Developing Media Literacy and Knowledge: Opportunities and Challenges Using Digital Video Production

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Abstract: *Increased globalization, transnationalism and influences of the new media have presented our youths with both challenges and opportunities. It is thus essential for youths to develop a sense of media awareness and activism to facilitate social learning. Youths must be capable of spotting a stereotype, distinguish facts from fiction, and news from propaganda. In building a productive learning culture to protect youths from the negative impacts of the media, media literacy is a necessary intervention in developing critical understandings, creative abilities, and active participations.*
This paper examines the changing media environment and how this state of affairs presents both opportunities and challenges for today's youth. In examining the role video production plays in creating media literacy, this paper demonstrates how video production develops media literacy and knowledge that is a required and essential skill in creating youths capable of thinking, analyzing and comprehending critically.
Keywords*: Media literacy, youths, video production, digital media production*

I. Introduction

In today's digital age, increased globalization, transnationalism and influences of the new media have presented our youths with both challenges and opportunities. It is thus important that young individuals are capable in developing a sense of media awareness and activism to facilitate social learning in relation to the surrounding world (Livingstone, 2002; Garrison, 1999). For these forms of new media play different roles and have different forms of influences (Buckingham, 1993; 2002), the growth of new media technologies have ignited a range of overlapping debates about how it influences creativity in the teaching of the young (Luke, 1998; Aufderheide, 1997).

Besides the commitments to studying, making good grades, friendships, and coping with life's stress, many young people today are faced with a variety of challenges and dissimilar viewpoints concerning culture and the struggles of both local and foreign communities (Potter, 2005). Any discussion of modern learning is sure to turn, at some point, to the role played by screen medias such as the television, computer, internet, and, lately mobile phones with camera (Hobbs, 1998; Bazalgette, 1997). An engagement with these forms of technologies involve a complex intersection of visual images and information, ideas, research and references across an array of digital and print formats (Hilton, 1996; Buckingham, 2002b). These forms of engagements leads to the notion that young people can no longer be categorized as a group of docile, passive receivers of media content, but as a group capable of harnessing creativity, knowledge and skills in producing media and visual material (Brown, 1998; Gauntlett, 1998). As such, this paper is based upon the study on media audiences and media literacy with a focus on media activities that form a significant part of everyday thinking and learning of young people (Buckingham, 2003; Ferguson, 1991).

II. Defining Media Literacy

On the overall, media literacy has multiple definitions depending on the discipline of its researcher (Eagle, 2007). In its simplest term, it is defined as a form of attempted protectionism, to immunize children against harmful imagery and ideology, in incorporating the understanding and transmission of culture, and analysis of information control and cultural ideologies. Silverbratt (2007) defines media literacy as 'a critical thinking skill that is applied to most of the information we receive'. To Silverbratt, the most essential feature of media literacy is the development of strategies for the systematic analysis of media content. Burton (2005) defines media literacy as 'the ability to "read" and understand visual, aural and digital messages, and categorizes the various dimensions of media literacy into the cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and infer (p. 95). Through media literacy students would be able to firstly, recognize the power of the media to influence; secondly, recognize how the presentation of information and ideas is influenced by social, cultural, political and historical events; and thirdly, produce various formats of media (Considine, 2002). Buckingham (2002) argues that media literacy develops both critical understandings and active participations that develop the critical and creative

abilities of young peoples. Buckingham (2007) further states that, 'the aim of media literacy is not primarily to develop technical skills or promote self expression but to encourage more systematic understandings of how the media operates and to encourage more reflective use of the media' (p. 115). In addition, Buckingham stresses that a "hands on" experience with digital technology is only the beginning of a learning culture that will fully enable young people to engage with images and texts in meaningful ways (2007).

III. Changing Media Environment And Media Literacy

Currently, the capability to comprehend print is no longer adequate when much of the information we receive consists of a mixture of still and moving images, sound, and text (Buckingham, 2003). According to Bazalgette et.al (2000), a 'critical understanding of film, video and television is becoming an integral part of literacy and the spread of digital technologies means that the ability to make and manipulate moving images will become an ever more important skill' (p. 4). Considine (2002) adds that, 'It is no longer enough to simply read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual messages as well' (p. 25). It is thus important that students must learn to spot a stereotype, distinguish facts from fiction, and news from propaganda. Media literacy in education and training is a necessary intervention in building a productive learning culture to protect consumers, in particular children, from the negative impacts of advertising (Eagle, 2007). The possession of this literariness requires a mentality capable of questioning and looking beyond the surface when evaluating information in terms of its sense of balance, bias and accuracy (Buckingham, 2003). This situation will generate responsible and accountable citizens that form a democratic society, which will additionally, require an acquirement of information skills and critical thinking (Considine, 2002). For that reason, media literacy and knowledge becomes a required and essential skill in this mass-mediated environment.

In this new digital media age, young people need to be well-informed through sustained educational initiatives in facing the challenges posed by today's new mediated environment (Buckingham, 2002). There remains a shortage of studies on young people's roles as media producers and their interpretations on the media products of other youths (Niestyto et.al, 2003). For example, schools have hardly begun to teach students how to view or listen critically to media messages, despite the fact that students are exposed to such messages. This situation presents a current lack of support and advice available for students to negotiate unreliable and contradictory information available in new media, namely information on the internet (Buckingham, 2007). Furthermore, literacy of this new media is fast becoming a necessary skill for adults who are becoming increasingly incapable of controlling their children's access to the media (Buckingham, 2002).

Media Literacy - Shared Interests and Roles

It has become the responsibility of the education system and family members in preparing today's young to survive in a world surrounded by powerful images, words and sounds. This attainment of media literacy becomes most effective when parents, teachers, media personnel, and decision makers understand their roles in developing greater critical awareness amongst students (Buckingham, 2002). This is because while students constantly 'consume' a large amount of media, they do not possess an understanding and awareness of the factors that shape the media (Hoffmann, 1999). Young people today have greater access to information available through an assortment of media. The media thus plays a significant role in shaping values and developing an awareness of the outside world (Buckingham, 2003) for the information contained in these media forms may either support or misdirect young people on their journey to adulthood. In providing students critical information skills to become efficient consumers and creators of media messages (Buckingham, 2007), it is necessary for today's youths to be capable of decoding and understanding the language, genre, codes, and conventions of the media.

Young People and Digital Video Production

Media educators should encourage young people to learn about media production activities in encouraging and helping them learn about themselves and others. Digital media production in video format has been a contributing factor to the formation of media literacy in its audiences. In making them "writers" as well as "readers" of the visual media (Buckingham, 1993, p.297), they comprehend the implications of how the media can present information differently, to give emphasis or exclude it (Gauntlet, 1997). In the course of producing a video, relationships are developed when youths are provided with a platform to freely discuss their issues and problems (Tyner, 2003). Video production also helps in learning about young people's view about a particular issue. According to Nestyto et. al, 'To learn about young people's views and perspectives, we should give them opportunities to express themselves through their own media productions, as well as share their creations with other youths' (p. 463). The increased access to media making tools amongst youths worldwide can help develop transnational cultures through their own distinctive practices, bodies of knowledge, conventions, and lifestyles (Featherstone, 1995). As such, youths should be taught video production skills to

produce alternative representations of themselves and for their voices to be heard; while countering adult created dominant representations (Fleetwood, 2005).

Students are able to apply skills of critical analysis, thinking, synthesizing, evaluating knowledge, and attitude when digital tools are utilized (Tyner, 2003). Experienced learners using media literacy productions construct their own understanding using hands-on experiences that encourage the development of critical thinking skills, and use authentic tasks of inquiry, reasoning and problem solving that reflect on contemporary issues (SAGE Project Report, 1992). Buckingham (2002) pointed out that developing the creativity of the young enables their voices to be heard. This provides the basis for more democratic and inclusive forms of media production in the future. In a study conducted by Niestyto et.al (2003), the participants report that adults cannot communicate with teens as effectively as youths amongst themselves. They argue that youths living in different regions and speaking different languages are more effective at communicating with them, as compared to the adults in their own country. In this sense, media production when uploaded on the internet provides young people an effective opportunity to express their ideas and beliefs globally. Videos should be uploaded onto websites meant exclusively for young people that will enable young people worldwide to view the videos and interact online (Fleetwood, 2005). Even though separated by culture, race and geographical location, young people from various parts of the world will better identify with the views, ideas, issues, and messages communicated through the videos when bonded by a common community of youths (Fleetwood, 2005).

IV. Media Literacy Training

Media literacy training programmes should include the elements of media language (Burton, 2005). The teaching of production fundamentals and conventions such as fade in and out, low and high angles technical codes like training and composition, soundtrack, media genres, formats, computer software types, and games can help children develop media literacy from an early age. This can be achieved by discussing still images and their meanings, through the usage of photographs, street signs, logos, and the impact of color, body language, and gesture. Similarly, Chen (2007) adds that as the power of multimedia is being understood by children, it becomes necessary to educate them on technical aspects such as screen direction, perspective, colors, and diagonal lines. Burton (2008) expressed that through media production, students 'become more critically aware of the process of media, learn the language of media through practice rather than theory, and discover the relationship between media and the audience. Children benefit most when they learn to work collaboratively and with a production focus, gaining skills in planning and working to a deadline' (p. 68). Chen (2007) then highlights that only a few decades ago, students could only analyze the media products produced by adult professionals for media tools were too expensive or bulky. Today however, the presence of media tools has become omnipresent, whereby every child is now capable of telling a story by simply using a camera and laptop.

The quality and style of student media productions depends on the particular contexts in which they were produced (Niestyto et.al, 2003). This is for the filmic language employed by the students will depend on their social and cultural backgrounds, and the available cultural capital (Niestyto et.al, 2003). In terms of video quality, student productions will circulate as 'video low' (little technical expertise, considered more authentic), and not as 'video high' (highly produced, mass distributed) (Fiske, 1990). In other words, the realness of the production and authenticity of experience represented in these videos will attract a viewer's attention. In terms of modes of narrative or narrative styles, young people prefer 'open' productions to 'closed' ones (Niestyto et.al, 2003), if the message is bold and simple and did not leave enough space for self made meanings, young people often expressed disapproval.

The learning experiences of students depend on the pedagogical choices of concepts, themes and topics made by teachers (Fien, 2000). One of the significant advantages of media productions is its learning environment that is more student centered, collaborative, multimedia based, inquiry based, and exploratory, proactive action, authentic and based on real world contexts (ISTE Research Report, 2000). In the teaching of media literacy, learning outcomes will be more successful when concepts are taught using a hands-on approach as compared to the dissemination of theoretical knowledge through lectures. Similarly, Tyner (2003) affirms this notion by stating that today's curriculum is dominated by applied, directed and delivered pedagogies and media literacy programmes, that provides room for reflective enquiry-based and student-driven processes. It is crucial for critical media literacy pedagogy to involve identifying ideological codes and dominant social values embedded in media texts (Hammer, 2006) for media literacy also helps in reshaping the teaching methods and practices to become more inquiry based and student centered (Hobbs, 1997).

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the digital media world of today requires its youth to be able to grasp a deep knowledge and understanding of media literacy. Understanding media literacy provides young individuals with a capability of developing a sense of media awareness and activism in response to the ever-changing surroundings of today's

world. Media literacy training has become a necessity in creating a learning environment that not only protects children from the negative impacts of the media, but to also equip students with a critical mentality capable of questioning and looking beyond the surface in evaluating information. Young people need to be well-informed through sustained educational initiatives in finding a sense of balance, bias and accurately recognizing a stereotype, distinguish facts from fiction, and news from propaganda. This will generate responsible and accountable citizens that form a democratic society in facing the challenges posed by today's new mediated environment. For that reason, media literacy and knowledge becomes a required and essential skill in this mass-mediated environment. The presence of digital media production through video production has helped form media literacy in student, by making "writers" as well as "readers" of the visual media. The procurement of necessary skills such as analyzing, thinking and evaluating critically can be achieved when digital tools and hands-on teaching approaches are used. Capable of comprehending the implications of how the media can present information differently, video has provided a platform for youths to develop relationships when video provides itself as a platform for youths to freely discuss their issues and problems, and in learning about other young people's view about a particular issue. These relationships thus create bonds and relationships in helping youths comprehend and understand the changes occurring in today's world.

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