CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF VIDEO PRODUCTION IN TEACHER EDUCATION: CAN VIDEO PRODUCTION FOSTER COMMUNITY-ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP?

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ABSTRACT. In the theoretical framework of production pedagogy, I reflect on a video production project conducted in a teacher education program and discuss the potential of video production to foster community-engaged scholarship among pre-service teachers. While the importance of engaging learners in creating media has been emphasized, studies show little evidence of its pedagogical usefulness. In particular, what learners actually learn through video production remains relatively unknown. In this article, I examine pre-service teachers' reflections on their participation in the video project and argue that, to promote community-engaged scholarship, teacher educators should encourage pre-service teachers to interact with people in their communities in making videos.

ANALYSE CRITIQUE DE LA PRODUCTION DE VIDÉOS DANS UN CADRE DE FORMATION DES ENSEIGNANTS : LA PRODUCTION DE VIDÉOS PEUT-ELLE ENCOURAGER LA RECHERCHE COMMUNAUTAIRE?

RÉSUMÉ. M'arrimant au cadre théorique de la pédagogie de production, j'analyse un projet de production vidéo réalisé au sein d'un programme de formation des enseignants. Je traite également du potentiel de la production vidéo comme agent encourageant la recherche communautaire chez les futurs enseignants. Si l'importance d'impliquer les apprenants dans la création médiatique a été reconnue, les recherches présentent peu d'éléments prouvant sa pertinence pédagogique. Plus particulièrement, ce que les étudiants apprennent via la production vidéo est relativement méconnu. Dans cet article, j'étudie les réflexions qu'ont formulées de futurs enseignants dans le cadre d'un projet de production vidéo et soutiens que pour promouvoir la recherche communautaire, les formateurs doivent encourager les futurs enseignants à interagir avec les membres de leur communauté lors de la réalisation de vidéos.

"To an extent, every technological innovation presents an opportunity to rethink and reimagine a curriculum. Even chalkboards were once a novelty," stated Hammond and Lee (2010, p. 129). Today, digital video offers an opportunity to teach and learn about social phenomena in a way never imagined before. A growing number of teachers use digital video in classrooms in various ways, for instance, by showing video segments for group discussion or prompting learners to create videos for themselves (Bell & Bull, 2010). The importance of engaging learners in video creation is emphasized, especially in the context of K-12 education (Buckingham, 2009a; Norton & Hathaway, 2010). This is supported by the argument that teaching youth to create and share digital video can promote civic engagement among youth (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010). Despite a growing interest in the use of video production, however, studies show little evidence of its pedagogical usefulness (Benson et al., 2002; Norton & Hathaway, 2010). What learners actually learn through video production, and how video production contributes to their learning, remains relatively unknown. This presents a particular challenge to teacher education because pre-service teachers need to experience the pedagogical usefulness of video production for themselves and also to learn how to implement video production for their future teaching.

Situated in this context, this article provides an assessment of the pedagogical implications of video production in teacher education, in particular, as a way to foster community-engaged scholarship among pre-service teachers. By community-engaged scholarship, I mean the practice of exploring and learning about social phenomena through engagement in communities in social contexts. As I will discuss later, this concept is based on Fletcher and Cambre's (2009) notion of *implicated scholarship*, which emphasizes situating learners in social contexts. My discussion draws on a case study, which examined the experiences of pre-service teachers who created videos in a teacher education course at a major Canadian university. I begin by reviewing the theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical practices of media production in higher education, and then, introduce the case study. After an analysis of the case study, I discuss findings and conclude by suggesting some possible ways to promote community-engaged scholarship through video production in teacher education programs.

MEDIA PRODUCTION, PEDAGOGY, AND SCHOLARSHIP

With the advent of accessible digital media technology, youth are engaged in media more than ever. Video, in particular, is an important part of contemporary culture that enables the "popular representation" of individual or group identities (Buckingham, 2009b, p. 237). The increase in media engagement, however, has not necessarily increased civic engagement among youth (Buckingham, 2006; Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009). This brought to light the significance of critical media literacy with a focus on

alternative media production (Kellner & Share, 2007). Emphasizing "production" in media literacy education, Norton and Hathaway (2010) commented:

> Students cannot become truly media literate — deeply critical consumers of mass media — until they can experience making photographs, planning and organizing ideas through storyboards, writing scripts and performing in front of a camera, designing a web page, and reporting a news story. (p. 146)

The pedagogical implications of media production can be explained through the theory of production pedagogy. Central to this theory is the pedagogical potential of production practice. Drawing on the notion of "exquisite attention" (Lather, 2007, p. 16), De Castell (2010) argued that learners become fully engaged in learning when they pay attention to what they can do while creating something new by using unfamiliar tools available to them. Video production can be one such tool because it requires an unusual combination of aesthetic sensibilities (Eisner, 2002; Thomson, 2008) and a set of audiovisual techniques. My experience supports this idea. Despite the massive quantity of video that saturates contemporary society, as seen on YouTube for example, my interactions with pre-service teachers, at least in North America, suggest that their experiences are generally limited to viewing or consuming videos and that the experience of producing videos is not common. This resonates in the scholarly observations that a relatively small number of people possess the necessary skills to create and distribute videos online and that their videos receive a disproportionally high volume of attention; this unbalance reduces the possible impact that today's new media environment could have on youth civic engagement (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010). The importance of teaching media production skills has been emphasized to counteract this unmet potential so that all youth can be equipped with the necessary skills to create and share media (Jenkins et al., 2009). The need to incorporate video / media production in teacher education is aligned with this call.

However, the pedagogical outcomes and usefulness of video production in teacher education are little known and even equivocal. Hall and Hudson (2006) incorporated video production in a cross-curricular course to engage pre-service teachers in learning about social justice and diversity issues. They concluded that the course contributed to the pre-service teachers' gaining both video production skills and content knowledge. They decided, however, to discontinue the project because of the high level of stress placed on the pre-service teachers due to making videos. This suggests that the pedagogical reality of video production may be much less than the potential it holds.

The gap between the reality and the potential may be due in part to a lack of clarity in defining the goal of incorporating video production into teacher education. In this regard, I pay attention to Fletcher and Cambre (2009), who suggested that media production is useful in promoting community engagement. To explain this, they presented the idea of implicated scholarship,

referring to a "means of positioning students, academics, research, teaching, and learning within the social dynamic they inhabit," which constitutes a "humanistic, reflexive, and politically conscious form of intellectual engagement" (p. 111). To promote implicated scholarship, they argued, university classroom activities should change so as to be linked to the social dynamics surrounding universities. In this context, they examined digital storytelling as an example of innovative class activities. Digital storytelling refers to a form of story writing that uses various digital contents, such as digital still images, music, and voiceover narration (Center for Digital Storytelling, n.d.; Fletcher & Cambre, 2009). Fletcher and Cambre concluded that digital storytelling enabled university students to experience "complex intellectual engagement that is at once creative, socially oriented, and pedagogical" (p. 111) and to learn about social issues differently from traditional classroom activities.

Video production is similar to digital storytelling in that both use narrative and visual modes, but unique in that it allows capturing moving images synchronized with sounds. Hence it may offer a distinct pathway for promoting implicated scholarship. This idea is critical to this article. In the article, however, I opt for the phrase *community-engaged scholarship* because it seems more self-explanatory and specific than the phrase *implicated scholarship* for the purpose of my discussion. In what follows, I present the context of my study and outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF THE VIDEO PRODUCTION PROJECT

In this section, I introduce the video production project carried out for five consecutive weeks as part of regular class activities in a teacher education course at a Canadian university. According to its syllabus, the course aimed to "prepare future teachers to be competent media and technology educators" for primary and secondary education. It consisted of a weekly 80-minute lecture and a weekly 80-minute lab session throughout a semester. Nearly 90 students attended the lectures together and divided themselves into four groups to participate in separate lab sessions. As a teaching assistant, I guided the lab activities of two groups — 42 students in total. My discussion focuses on the video production project that these two groups of pre-service teachers were involved in.

The 42 students formed 12 small groups to create short videos related to the overarching theme of social justice. Each group chose a specific topic on their own. To help them develop video production skills, I provided them with copies of a storyboard template and introduced basic camera recording techniques and video editing procedures using the *i-Movie* software installed in each computer (Mac) of the lab. While some students were already familiar with the software, others were not even used to Mac computers. To facilitate the process of video editing, I offered the students the option to bring their laptop computers to the classroom to edit their videos on the software of their

choice. The students were allowed to incorporate existing digital contents, such as videos, still images, and music files downloaded from the Internet or of their own, including copyrighted materials, on the condition that their final videos would not be shared in public. In case of interviewing, the students were asked to obtain informal consent from interviewees. The students spent extra hours beyond the class time for shooting and editing their videos. Their commitment to the project resulted in 12 short videos. Some were created with people outside the class or dramatized; others addressed some critical issues, such as child abuse, immigration, and poverty, using interviews or other forms of video recording. The duration of each final video was between four and seven minutes. On the fifth week, the students and I viewed the videos together in the classroom and had discussions.

In order to gain a deep insight into the pre-service teachers' experiences with video making, at the end of the project, I asked them to write a short individual essay (a couple of paragraphs) about their experiences, with a focus on what they liked or disliked. Their submission was voluntary. They had the option to submit their essays either via email or anonymously by leaving a hard copy in my mailbox. Sixteen of 42 students submitted their essays and all opted for email submission. Although the submission rate was low, the essays provided insight into the students' experiences. Because I wanted to analyze the essays in a research context, I contacted the research ethics board of the university and submitted an ethics application. The board saw my study as a "secondary data analysis situation." Because the course was already over, they waived the requirement of obtaining consent from the individual students. They also commented that anonymous surveys would not require consent from individuals. Upon the ethics approval, I began to analyze the pre-service teachers' individual essays. These are the main source of my analysis.

EXAMINING THE INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION ESSAYS

I examine the essays submitted by 16 of the pre-service teachers who participated in the video project. Using the method for qualitative data analysis suggested by Creswell (2009) as guidance, first, I read the essays several times to obtain a general sense of what the pre-service teachers' experiences were like. Next, I coded them by breaking each essay into small segments as meaning units and selected a significant statement for each unit (Moustakas, 1994). I then classified the significant statements. Through this the following six categories emerged: (1) the use of various digital contents; (2) creativity; (3) technical challenges; (4) the nature of group work; (5) content learning; and (6) the intent to use video production for future teaching. Lastly, with the notions of production pedagogy (De Castell, 2010) and implicated scholarship (Fletcher & Cambre, 2009) in mind, I re-examined the significant statements in each category and across the categories and paid particular attention to conflicting views connoted in the statements.

IMPLICATIONS OF VIDEO CREATION IN LEARNING

I focus on the notion of "creation" that commonly emerged from the pre-service teachers' reflection essays. The pre-service teachers tend to think that the process of creation promotes learning; they, however, indicate conflicting views of creation. While many pre-service teachers emphasized integrating existing digital media as creativity, others pointed to making original video content as an essential aspect of creativity. In what follows I discuss this issue in more detail, especially in relation to its implications in pre-service teachers' learning.

A number of pre-service teachers pointed to the aspect of creation as the reason why they liked the project, as suggested in their comments:

> It is really a worthwhile experience to put what you've learned into action, referring to the content as much as to the process (editing and filming).
>
> The creative freedom for this assignment was enjoyable and enriching.
>
> I appreciate the liberty we were given in regards to our social justice issue.
>
> I really liked this project because it was very different from anything else I've been assigned in the University.

These comments suggest that the pre-service teachers enjoyed the liberty to choose a topic and create content on their own, unlike in ordinary university courses. They also suggest that the flexibility involved in the project enriched their experience of gaining content knowledge. This is indicated more clearly in the following comments:

> I like that the film was on a social just issue because it allowed me to reflect on different issues happening around the world and try and present an issue as a film.
>
> The topic on poverty helped me to adjust my thinking. Knowing that some people have no water made me think of how I could cut down on water.

Several pre-service teachers noted that they experienced content learning either in the process of creating their videos or through classroom screening of the videos created by others. This suggests, as implied in the theory of production pedagogy (De Castell, 2010), that the video project facilitated the process of pre-service teachers' gaining content knowledge by prompting them to explore social justice on their own. The project might have engaged them in self-directed learning in the sense that they controlled what to learn and how to go about it (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1978).

In a similar vein, many pre-service teachers saw the video production project as a pathway for learning digital technology and pointed to integrating multiple forms of digital media into their videos as the most interesting experience.

They commented as:

> I was able to further expand my knowledge with regard to technology.
>
> I was really moved having the job to look for all the pictures for the slide show.
>
> I am also quite happy that the project guidelines were flexible in the sense that we did not have to have just videos, but could also include text, photographs, and audio recordings.

Very often, the pre-service teachers turned to existing digital materials in creating their videos. To provide a sense of the ratio between new video content (created by them) and existing digital media content (borrowed from other sources), I examined the time length of each content type of the student-produced videos. I included interviews, narration or music over video images, and other recorded video materials as new video content; video clips or photographs downloaded from websites and text graphics showing some relative information (e.g. statistics), as existing media content. Approximately one-third of the final videos consisted of existing media content, and the majority was voiceover narration accompanied by existing still images. Of course, determining what constitutes original video or other content types was sometimes subjective, as multiple content types were often integrated in one segment through the process of editing. Despite some possible incongruity in classifying content types, however, my review suggests that the majority of the pre-service teachers used existing digital media content and turned to literature or other sources of information (e.g. the Internet) in speaking of their video topics.

More interestingly, some pre-service teachers thought that such digital content made their videos more dynamic and powerful. They commented as:

> I especially liked the groups that integrated many areas of technology in their movies (namely video footage, pictures, music, statistics, etc.). In my estimation, this made the movie much more dynamic.
>
> I liked the use of facts and / or statements in the video.

The integration of existing digital media into video production may be helpful to promoting multimodal literacy. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) stated that digital-electronic technologies affect sending and receiving information, which becomes "seamlessly multimodal rather than distinct process for distinct modes (text, image, sound)" (p. 25). They argued that literacy education therefore should change to understand and utilize the multimodal quality of information. Digital video production, in particular, may provide pre-service teachers with an opportunity to experience a "quintessential multimodal literacy that allows orchestration of visual, aural, kinetic, and verbal modes electronically" (Miller, 2007, p. 66) and thus allow them to prepare for teaching *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001), which refer to the generation of youth feeling more comfortable with digital technologies than adults. These arguments are consistent with the above comments made by pre-service teachers. While the majority of the

pre-service teachers championed the capacity of integrating multiple forms of media as creativity, one of them had a different perspective and emphasized the importance of creating new video content. As he put it:

> I really like the fact that my group's film used only original images. It is very easy to take powerful images off the Internet and put them into a film, but it's entirely another experience to use completely original material and content.

The video, *Children* (pseudonym), which this student was involved in creating, deals with children's relationships, such as bullying and caring and expresses them in a subtle but visually astonishing way. As one of the creators of the video explained in class, the video project prompted the children who had participated in the video project to spontaneously talk about some of the issues they had been experiencing; this led the creators and the children to collaborate. Due to the scope of this study, I cannot definitely say about what the pre-service teachers came to learn through the project. The previous quote, however, suggests that the video creators obtained a unique learning experience through collaborating with children to make their video. By talking and interacting with the children face-to-face, they might have been able to access the kind of relationships among children that could be described only through children's eyes and words. Through this process, the pre-service teachers might have had an opportunity to gain knowledge in a way that might not be possible either in an ordinary classroom or through mixing existing materials downloaded from the Internet.

Drawing on this analysis, I want to further discuss the implications of video "creation" in pre-service teachers' experiences of learning. The process of digital editing offers many ways of exercising multimodal literacy and pre-service teachers may need to understand the nature and applications of it. It is questionable, however, whether the experience of orchestrating multiple modes of media is the best thing that video production can offer to learners. Put it this way: What can *video*, which can capture moving images synchronized with sounds, uniquely offer to learners other than providing a platform to combine existing materials and literature?

In one video, for instance, its creators addressed critical issues of water. They often used the form of talking-head shots to provide viewers with relevant information of the issues that they had found through a literature review. Without a doubt, they might have learned a lot about the topic they were addressing through the processes of searching for information and contemplating ways of presenting it. I do believe that speaking in front of a camera, as shown in talking-head shots, requires a significant thought process and that the creators had a unique experience of learning. Their video, however, presents little evidence that the creators explored and delivered the kind of information that only a video camera could afford. In other words, a video camera did not seem necessary for them to access the information presented

in their video. A slide show that includes a series of still images and texts, as if a digital storytelling, could have been sufficient to deliver the same information. Through media production, students can be prompted to engage in "questions of agency, authority and knowledge production" (Goldfarb, 2002, p. 13). Hence, I have no doubt that the video project provided pre-service teachers a unique opportunity to explore and learn new topics. What I want to problematize here is the significance of creating original video content in their learning experiences; in other words, the unique role that video production can play in promoting the process of learning.

One reason why I think of creating new video content as important is that this may lead pre-service teachers to interact with other people and allow them to experience community-based scholarship; in so doing, they can have an opportunity to position themselves within social dynamics surrounding the areas in which they are comfortably sheltered (Fletcher & Cambre, 2009). The creation of new video content may not necessarily entail collaboration with people. Through this process, however, pre-service teachers are likely to gain knowledge that may not be obtainable or discussed in a typical university classroom. Therefore, I believe that teacher educators need to encourage pre-service teachers to create new video content with a video camera through interactions with people in their communities. This approach to video production can allow pre-service teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the topics they explore. What is more, I do not think that focusing on the creation of new video content necessarily diminishes the potential to experience multimodal literacy. As the creators of *Children* demonstrated through their video, pre-service teachers can develop visual sensitivities and aesthetics (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001) through the process of contemplating how to effectively deliver stories learned through their community engagement. This kind of sensitivities is much higher and more useful skills than simply mixing media in terms of multimodal literacy.

To advance my discussion on the magnitude of creating video content, I refer to a community-based video project that I was involved in (Yang, 2013). Through the project, I provided a productive space for adult learners to bring out and share grassroots experiences with health care through video making (Yang et al., 2012). The procedures undertaken in the project were similar to that of the case study. The six adult learners, whose ages ranged between their mid-20s and 40s, worked in two groups for six consecutive weeks to create videos and share them with the public. Unlike the case study, no credit was given to the adult learners. The learners and I had regular weekly meetings for approximately three hours per meeting. To create videos, the adult learners interviewed their neighbours, a doctor, and a nurse and talked about their own experiences in front of cameras. Because the learners and I intended to disseminate the videos in public, no copyrighted materials were used and I obtained ethics clearance. A clip from one of the videos created by them is embedded in this article as an example (see Video 1).

VIDEO 1. *Rx for healthcare* (click to activate)

At the end of the project, the adult learners talked about their experiences in the project and submitted short individual essays about their experiences. The participants of the project addressed their experiences as:

> I also learned about the gift of a community, as many people who we interviewed were genuinely concerned about the issue of health and we ourselves learned a lot about the issue as we filmed along, which was a true gift.
>
> Video is another way to reach out to people, meeting people, showing people in a visual way. This way we can make a big difference.

Nearly all parts of the videos created by the participants are comprised of original video content. They include interviews with people in their communities and talking-head shots, in which the learners shared their personal experiences related to the topics of their videos. Through the process of video creation, the project participants sought ways to reach out to their communities. In so doing, they seemed to develop a sense of activism rooted in their communities. Here the video camera was used as a means to connect people and promote community engagement (Baker, Waugh, & Winton, 2010; White, 2003). In comparison, the video camera in the teacher education program was relatively under-utilized; the video project became similar to desktop publishing. I do not think that the project enabled the pre-service teachers to take full advantage of what the video camera could offer, as the majority opted for mixing multiple forms of existing digital media, as opposed to reaching out to their communities to create videos. This might have contributed to limiting the pre-service teachers' practice of community-based scholarship.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Video production offers profound opportunities for learners to enhance technological confidence and to learn subjects they explore through creative processes. It can also offer them an opportunity to practice community-engaged scholarship through interactions with each other and people in their communities in a way that may not be possible in a typical university classroom. The pedagogical potential of video production, however, can be undermined when learners focus on combining existing digital materials rather than engaging in their communities to create videos. Although the creation of videos through

mixing existing materials may contribute to enriching their content knowledge, this may less likely to promote community-engaged scholarship than video making through community engagement. To promote community-engaged scholarship among pre-service teachers, teacher educators need to encourage pre-service teachers to go into communities to listen to what the members of the communities have to say and to observe what is happening; educators may even want to consider encouraging pre-service teachers to seek ways to collaborate with the members in creating videos.

A potential debate may converge on how pre-service teachers can find sufficient time for community engagement, for, as Hall and Hudson (2006) discussed, they can only allocate limited time for their video projects. Indeed, this may be one reason why many pre-service teachers of the case study chose to use existing digital materials downloaded from the Internet, as opposed to creating new video content. The choice they made indeed reflects Fletcher and Cambre's (2009) criticism that the practice of learning in universities is commonly performed in social isolation. I believe video projects can make a difference. They would not, however, bring about a significant change in this typical learning practice when video cameras are not actively used as a tool to observe environments and interact with people. It is neither a medium nor technology that can make a difference in the ways pre-service teachers engage in learning. In order to offer pre-service teachers an opportunity to experience a radically different learning process and to relate their learning to their communities, teacher educators should encourage them to go to their communities with video cameras and to obtain authentic video footage however trivial it may seem to look. In this way, pre-service teachers may be able to be involved in video projects more meaningfully while minimizing time stress.

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