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Bridging Girls' "Double Lives": Instructional Practices to Engage Critical Literacy in Elementary and Secondary School through Video Production

by Jamilee Baroud

Digital literacy education equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to navigate and succeed in the 21st century. Increasingly, teachers are being asked to make digital literacies learning relevant to students' lives by applying the pedagogical principles learned in recreational spaces to in-school contexts. It is not uncommon for female students to engage with, respond to, and create digital texts in their personal lives with extraordinary intellectual and technical ability (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Heineken, 2015; Keller, 2015; Maguire, 2015). These recreational practices, however, seldom transfer into school-based contexts, and much of girls' technological interests and abilities are invisible to teachers in schools (Elliot & Prescott, 2014; Itō et al., 2008). The in- and out-of-school literacy gap is so wide that the phenomenon is now referred to as girls living "double lives" (Williams, 2005; see also Brudvik, 2015; Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, & Pearson, 2004).

What challenges must be overcome in our classrooms to bridge girls' double lives? What can educators do to improve and enhance digital literacies learning? In what follows, I synthesize tips on how to engage girls' diverse identities through critical video production activities in school. The following collection of tips from unique cultural and historical contexts and disciplines, in combination with the inclusion of multiple female identity categories, provides a rich starting point to understand the ways girls of multiple and diverse race, gender, class, sexuality, language, and religious backgrounds are educated in the field, and the factors that influence their success and participation.



Jamilee Baroud

The recommendations synthesized in this article were retrieved using a review of qualitative studies of digital video production and transferable skills of multi-media text production, and encompass studies conducted in Canada, United States, Australia, and Mexico. I developed and implemented activities, assignments, and lectures in my teaching practice that reflect the recommendations of these studies. In this article I reflect on what did and did not work, as well as how and why it worked (as applicable), so as to make specific instructional recommendations. In this way, each *tip* is designed and pedagogically informed by the scholars I cite within each section. However, the step-by-step model and the activities, assignments, and lectures therein are written from my experience implementing video production inside the classroom. Most of the assignments and activities I created alone, others I created in conversation with colleagues, and some I adapted from and are inspired by colleagues and mentors in the field.

Critical Video Production: The Five Tips for Instructional Practice

Tip 1: Forge a Community of Practice

Recent in-school literature stipulates that disengagement is caused by the intergenerational struggle over authority and control over learning in the classroom.

Teachers' lack of confidence and/or competence either leads to a lack of engagement with digital literacies inside the classroom (Sanford, 2005), or leads to interventions that limit students' authority and discourage active participation (Wohlwend, 2009). As Moje (2000) has long argued, we "can learn valuable lessons for extending literacy theory, practice, and research from the sophisticated—albeit marginalized and vilified—practices of these youth" (p. 653; also see Hasinoff, 2012). The aim is to discover the digital literacy practices that motivate students to learn.

To this end, do not permit your level of technical knowledge deter you from integrating video production in the classroom. Trial and error seem risky because from a student's perspective it is not seamless, but the risk is minor compared to the value of integration. To support this:

- Be transparent with your students and say, "I am a learner. We are all learners. And we all have something to learn from each other."
- Call upon your students to share their tech savvy competencies and skills. Privilege their knowledge, expertise, and autonomy. Acknowledge, name, and credit students' tech savvy innovations.

Tech trends shift quickly and the task to predict these future trends is futile. Envisage that your role is not to be an expert on trendy social media sites that constantly alter and change. Your role is to connect the literacy practices of your students (Instagram, YouTube, blogging) to the tools (video, photography, text) and skills (how to take the perfect selfie, writing concisely, managing self-representation online) that will remain relevant over time. To support this:

- Through discussion, assignments, and attentiveness, aim to investigate who your students are as literacy learners. Discover how their literate selves can be translated into a classroom context so that assignments are meaningful and students are engaged. One way to do this is through the "literacy autobiography" assignment (inspired by Dharmsi, 2018). Ask students: *What are you currently*

reading, writing, viewing, listening to, or creating? Are these activities for personal pleasure or a means to an end? What contributions have these activities made to your life? Are your experiences at home different from your experiences at school? In what ways?

- Investigate what students gain and/or lose when they represent themselves a particular way online. Start by asking: *What are the motivators to participating and producing content online? How important is it to receive external approval?* The aim is to uncover how, why, and with what purpose students are participating online.
- Together, discuss, debate, and determine the ethical know-how to navigate complex online practices that can keep students informed to make safe choices.

Tip 2: Be a Socializing Agent

Girls interested in the field of technology can be stigmatized for participating in what is often defined as a masculine domain (Itō et al., 2010) and must grapple with and negotiate how to authentically represent themselves while maintaining social status. Bridging girls' double lives then is about more than access to technology and development of skill—it is about the identity and peer status associated with certain technical skills and digital literacy practices. Although participation in the field of technology has value and potential in education, if these activities result in low social status, even technologically-savvy girls will experience lower self-efficacy and competence to accomplish tasks (Dill & Thill, 2007; King & Douai, 2014) which often results in opting out (Itō et al., 2008). Critical to girls' success is to have teachers who act as socializing agents (Ireland et al., 2018)—interpersonal influencers or supports who provide structure and guidance in the development of girls' confidence, identity, and achievement in the field of technology (Rice & Alfred, 2014).

Early exposure to technological learning opportunities is vital. When female students see examples of successful women and girls in related fields, whose identities, histories, behaviors, and characteristics are similar to theirs, they are more likely to participate. To support this:

- Expose students to prominent (or hidden) female figures in fields related to science, technology, video production, mathematics, playwright, drama, film, engineering, computer design, etcetera. Not sure where to start? Research Beatrice Worsley, the first Canadian female computer scientist, or Julia Grace Wales, a Canadian academic known for writing the Wisconsin Plan, a peace proposal to end the First World War.
- Include a range of current and historical female figures with diverse and intersectional identities. The world is diverse, and so, regardless of the demographics in your classroom, provide a range of female identities—not only majority and privileged identities, but the marginalized and silenced identities as well. Not sure where to start? Research Kenojuak Ashevak, a renowned artist and role model for Inuit women, or Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the first North American Black female newspaper editor.
- Examine and discuss the reality of gender, race, and class divisions within the technology industry. Critically assess whether, to what extent, and at what point stereotypes about academic (in)abilities are represented in mainstream media and how they may or may not be reflected in classroom culture. Be mindful of shifting and reframing these discourses (for a summary of current inequities in the technology industry see Wachter-Boettcher, 2017).
- Link being a socializing agent to curricula through activities such as the “heritage minute” assignment (inspired by Bergen, 2018). Ask students to select a historical figure, monument, statue, or issue that resonates with them. Next, ask students to research how their selected topic has been historically represented or misrepresented, and what the gaps in evidence, perspectives, and representation might be. Wondering how to incorporate technology into this assignment? See Tip 4: Pre-production and Production.

Tip 3: Enhance Critical Thinking Skills

A critical approach to video production requires an explicit engagement with social, environmental, cultural, and linguistic diversity. It enables debate between sociopolitical worldviews, discussions of relations of

power, critical engagement by learners with multi-media texts and discourses, and a space to challenge and address authors (Luke, 2012). Critical in this context also means that students’ creations and productions are infused with powerful insights from their lived experiences, perspectives, (de la Piedra, 2010; Rowsell & Burke, 2009; Wohlwend, 2009), and identities (Honeyford, 2014; Wargo, 2015). When students learn to use video to “make sense” of and express themselves (Burwell, 2013), they are able to rewrite their own stories differently than how they are (mis)perceived in mainstream media (Honeyford, 2014; Wargo, 2015). Additionally, it provides a space for students to investigate cultural interests to address issues relevant to their lives and communities (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004), advocate for social change, promote inclusivity and respect (Dahya & Jensen, 2015), and unite students of diverse backgrounds (Leard & Lashua, 2006).

It is important to encourage students to contemplate what factors may have informed their previous misconceptions of themselves and others (e.g., skills or confidence in a subject matter, age, grade, geographic location, gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, language and/or religion). To do this:

- Explicitly explain the distortions or misrepresentations in media messages that result from the use of particular media techniques and practices (lighting, sound, camera angle, emotive music, character traits, and roles). How? Try the, “What do you hear, what you do think, what do you see?” assignment. First, select a song that is rich with relevant, debatable, and conversational content. Second, ask students to close their eyes, actively listen to the song as it plays, and write down what they hear. Second, turn off the sound and ask students to watch the music video and write down what they see. Lastly, ask students to watch and listen to the music video and to write down what they think. This activity encourages students to reflect on their relationship with media and to experience the effect that particular media techniques and practices might have on their viewing and listening experiences.

- Cultivate, through discussion, the understanding that media are produced to inform, persuade, and entertain for a variety of positive and negative purposes. Highlight corporate strategy and marketing techniques to target audiences and impart the skills to critique and examine points of view.

It is equally important to provide opportunities for students to engage with, respond to, and become critical consumers of information. Critical in this context means developing the skills and tools to collect information from a variety of sources, to analyze language, content, and conditions of production to frame and solve prominent problems.

- Start by asking: Whose “truth” is being told in a text, how is it being represented, and in whose interest? Who has access to the text and for what purposes? Where can we acquire more information? Why is this of relevance? How can we add to or change the conversation?
- Encourage students to collect, question, interact, and contest knowledge. In this way, students become agents in their own learning and can practice searching for and retrieving information online, exchanging and discussing that information, and then critically evaluating it.

Tip 4: Pre-production and Production

Once a base for critical literacy has been developed, provide students with the opportunity to design and create their own videos. As Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner, and Peterson (1994) write, “If we ask students to critique the world but then fail to encourage them to act, our classrooms can degenerate into factories for cynicism” (p. 4). When girls are given the task to design their own projects, they often resist and transform traditional gender stereotypes (Denner, Bean, & Werner, 2005; Harvey, 2011) creating alternative, counter-hegemonic digital media (Levine, 2008; Rheingold, 2008) that challenges the status quo (Scott et al., 2013), which ultimately increases their level of confidence (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). As Itō and colleagues (2010) assert, “[S]hifting youth identity from that of a media consumer to a media producer is an

important vehicle for developing youth voice, creativity, agency, and new forms of literacy in a media saturated era” (p. 247). To do this:

- Provide time and material to play with video production inside the classroom and accept trial and error as part of the process. Yes—frustration is fundamental. Yes—sometimes materials are scarce. Work with what you have, encourage students to BYOD (bring your own device), and improvise for materials that you do not have.
 - o Step one: Concept development and storyboarding are a vital part of the production process. Ensure that students take the time to map out their storyline and to include visuals, text, shots, frames, and/or transitions. Rigidity is not the goal. Encourage students to find a creative process that works for them.
 - o Step two: The content of each student’s video will differ. The key element is to ensure that the video content resists and transforms the social limitations they encounter in mainstream media texts. How? Ask students to investigate their own interests in relation to their multiple identities, perspectives, and lived experiences, or to address an issue that they deem relevant to their lives, schools, environments or communities. Create a mentor video or text as an example for students to model; or, ask students to create a one-minute “heritage minute” video that tells or re-tells a story about the subject (see Tip 2: Be a Socializing Agent for the first half of this assignment). Students can film with their tablets, phones, or laptops, or you can film them using your own device. Want to add fun and finesse to the video production process? Use a green screen. Cannot afford a professional green screen? Use an old or new green or blue tablecloth or bed sheet instead. Feeling overwhelmed and underprepared? Regardless of the editing platform you use (i.e., iMovie, WeVideo,

Adobe Premier Elements, etc.) there are plenty of easy-to-follow green screen and editing tutorials online. As mentioned, trial and error is part of the process, and students will learn through experimentation, but it is beneficial to have a grasp on the basics of the digital tools and methods beforehand.

- Critical peer assessment is an invaluable step in the pre-production process. Once students complete their storyboards, ask them to share their ideas with their peers.
 - Encourage students to offer critical feedback and suggestions on each storyboard. How? The “Gallery Walk” activity (Baroud & Cloutier, 2018). Post each students’ storyboard on the wall and have them individually explain their storyboard to the class. Then, ask students to write their suggestions, comments, and questions on a sticky note and post it on the wall around the storyboard. Remember, revisions are a necessary step in the pre-production and production process, and we welcome and expect last minute, unplanned, and spontaneous modifications to students’ videos.
- Provide space for students to negotiate their roles in the video production process. Some students are gifted with writing scripts, some enjoy acting on camera, editing, filming, or directing. Negotiating tensions between author and actor, and sorting out meanings of texts is a vital part of the process.
 - Your role as an educator in the production process is to work with your students. How? Participate in the video production process as necessary—when asked to or expected to be helpful.

Tip 5: Share Digital Achievements

The process of sharing students’ digital achievements has been found to motivate girls to be agents in their own learning and to make thoughtful choices about writing topics (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004) and meaning and vocabulary (Amicucci, 2014; Emert, 2014). It has also been found to increase girls’ desire for

technology knowledge, expertise (Dezuanni, O’Mara, & Beavis, 2015), and design skills (Rowell & Burke, 2009), which also increases their confidence to share their know-how as tech-mentors to other students (Sanford, 2005). Perhaps most noteworthy, the process of dissemination eventually decreases girls’ levels of anxiety about producing media (Emert, 2014).

- Whether student-created videos are screened in class, in front of parents, during a school assembly, or posted online, students are encouraged to share their digital achievements with an audience.
 - Connect the dissemination process to the peer assessment process by screening each video in class and asking students to provide comments, questions, suggestions, and constructive feedback to their peers.
 - What can teachers do when students become reluctant to share unfinished products? Remind your students that perfection is a difficult concept to detach from, but sophisticated video production is not the goal—although it may be the result—the goal is for students to actively, critically, and successfully produce critical content for the purpose of social justice.

Conclusion

When educators begin to teach video production from the multiple perspectives and worldviews of students, they privilege the experiences of learners’ as curricular resources inside the classroom. As a teaching practice, critical video production entails untying from traditional knowledge and authority relations between students and teachers and instead, “learners become teachers of their understandings and experiences, and teachers become learners of these same contexts” (Luke, 2012, p.7). Equally important is shifting the central focus in our classrooms from learning to use technologies, to learning to critique multi-media texts and understand how they represent, manipulate, and frame relations of power. Integrating video production is, as Luke astutely notes, “not just a matter of designer careers and new technologies...it is about the possibility of using new literacies to change relations of power,

both peoples' everyday social relations and larger geopolitical and economic relations" (2012, p. 9). Technology integration models and social media platforms are multiple and ever changing. To successfully incorporate critical literacy through technology requires ingenuity, flexibility, and an understanding of our students' worldviews, struggles, and interests. The tips described in this paper provide a starting point for teachers, who are eager to engage with the complex structures of critical video production, to question, address, and change inequitable power relations related to gender, class, and racializations inside the classroom.

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