

Documentary Filmmaking or Scene Re-Creation for the Critical Pedagogy Classroom.

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Introduction

Growing up in rural farmland, the farmers, people of the area, and my peers were rarely represented within school, everyday communication, or mass-media. The workers, or labor-class, of a community often operate their everyday tasks invisibly, unnoticed by those of higher economic standing. With little representation and frequent misrepresentation in the media, and rare student interaction with the labor-class, how can students engage in critical inquiry about the socioeconomic, political, and cultural positions of these people. Perhaps if my high school working-class peers saw local family farmers speaking on a documentary, discussing their marginalizing profits, lack of federal support, and general suffocation by capitalism, they might not blame themselves for not attaining high status, they may see a wider picture of socioeconomic oppression.

Liberatory education should be implemented in radical and experimental ways to explore more effective maneuvers towards a critical consciousness, a sense of systems of oppression. With visual texts so prevalent in youth culture, it seems necessary that critical pedagogy instructors seek liberatory moves using visual data. As a way of reading their world, specifically their local community, “home-made” documentaries produced by the students, instructors, and community members could vividly bring the world into the classroom. The students could act as cultural workers and ethnographers by conducting interviews at local community events, like political rallies and town or school board elections, and interrogating the raw footage. Such a discourse could create cultural sites where voices, marginalized by the corporate financed mass-media, become a disruptive reality.

Making homemade documentaries

Through the home-made documentaries showing interviews with community members, students could recognize local community voices and issues. In *The Politics of Education*, Freire mentions the importance of “collecting peasant discourse” (Freire 24) to represent a concrete reality for the students. In the Western culture, collecting raw footage of interviews with local family farmers and automobile plant workers could create a Freirian linguistic analysis. Freire even mentions converting the discourse into a reading text by “tape-recording discussions” (Freire 24). As a classroom activity, the students, participating with their instructor in “decodifying,” can “analyze their reality and in their discourse they [can] express levels of seeing themselves relative to an objective situation” (Freire 24). Creating documentary films would be considered a direct, perhaps more modern, extension from Freire’s tape-recording process, a transition from aural representation to a visual one. This decodifying practice, Freire says, creates “linguistic analysis that in turn includes ideology and politics” (Freire 25). Through the documentary film and its representation of students in contact with community members, the students may better understand the codification of power. In Freire’s conception, “peasants from area A could listen to and discuss the tape recordings of their peers from area B decodifying the same codifications that they also had codified and vice versa” (Freire 25). Many local discourses

could be interrogated through the home-made documentaries and the inherent power of language may be realized.

Not only would students understand the power of their language, through these documentaries, they could locate themselves within their culture. Rather than just performing on interviews, the student filmmakers could record their everyday activities within the community. People engaged in everyday tasks could be analyzed to develop student understanding of their locations in the community. For example, as victims of what Pepi Leistyna calls “disarticulation,” many white lower-class individuals are “unable to locate their own location as an emergent construct of the relation between race and ethnicity...although virtually powerless socioeconomically, they buy into the illusion of being part of the norm with the self determining power to do as they please with their ethnic heritage...many believe they are ‘making it,’ even when in many cases they are worse off in terms of material struggle and self-actualization than those who they so readily castigate” (Leistyna 76). In *Presence of Mind*, Leistyna points out the importance of the students naming themselves within their world in order for them to make liberatory maneuvers. Actual documentaries of students at work may aid students in socioeconomically locating themselves, and thereby diminish their rationalizing of their inequality.

Unfortunately, implementation of such a critical pedagogy approach might not be financially sound in areas where liberatory practice is needed the most. One possible alternative to the actual use of the videocamera, or any costly technical device, could be having students use their artistic, expressive, and/or acting skills. Groups of students could conduct the interview with community members: one student conducts the interview or discourse, while others take notes on the action, describing the interplay and the body language of the two participants. Other group-members could sketch drawings of the setting and action during the interview, possibly in a storyboard fashion. Afterwards, the students could gather the accumulated raw data and work together on a presentation for the class; perhaps a play could be performed or a collaborative storytelling of the interview. The students should also discuss their collaboration process, particularly how they combined the perspectives of the group-members. These activities would be inexpensive alternatives to the home-made documentary and Freire’s tape recording procedure.

Conclusion

As Freire pointed out, “those who put my experience into practice must strive to recreate it” (Freire 11). The critical pedagogical ideal of looking through a new lens at the world can be made more concrete by the home-made documentary film activity. This activity could be an effective springboard for discovering or rediscovering and exploring working-class identity; and then moving onto interrogating systems of oppression. However, the home-made documentaries should be no more than “training wheels” in their development of critical lenses. Social betterment through non-technical intrinsic resources, particularly language, will be most effective in enacting subversive revolution.

Works Cited

Freire, Paulo. *The Politics of Education*. Bergin and Garvey: New York. 1985

Leistyna, Pepi. *Presence of Mind: Education and the Politics of Deception*. Westview Press: Boulder. 1999.