

YOUNG PEOPLE AND CREATIVE VIDEO PRODUCTION: A CASE STUDY OF MEDIA MAKING ON ISSUES OF STRESS AND FRIENDSHIP AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study in which groups of young people aged sixteen recorded videos, using camcorder equipment on the issues of stress and friendship in their lives. The main aim of the study was to engage young people with media critically and creatively. The paper describes how this project gave young people an opportunity to enhance their media literacy skills through a video production experience. In this digital media age, it is essential for the young people to develop a sense of media awareness and activism to facilitate social learning in relation to the surrounding world. In building a productive learning culture among young people, media literacy is a necessary intervention in developing critical understandings, creative abilities, and active participations. This paper presents the summary of findings related to production theme and narrative analysis of their videos. This study has demonstrated that digital video production can be a powerful vehicle for enhancing media literacy skills among young people in Malaysia.

Keywords: New Media literacy, Video making, Creative visual, Critical inquiry, Young people, Stress & Friendship.

INTRODUCTION:

Malaysia in the past few decades has experienced a flooding of various forms of new media. An authoritative media control and ownership of content is slowly eroding; the growth of new media and the Internet in Malaysia today has opened new alternative spaces for discussion, entertainment and social interaction especially among the young people but not much has been studied on the capacities of young people to analyse, interpret, evaluate and produce media works. The media are, without any doubt, a highly significant part of contemporary young people lives in Malaysia. Therefore, there is a clear case for exploring the status of media literacy among young people in Malaysia, as at present there is no formal learning of media education in school settings. The complexities surrounding media texts, media audiences and media institutions demand critical media literacy skills among young people in Malaysia. Therefore, there is a great need for introducing media literacy projects that can develop young media literacy skills of young people to meet the challenges in the present days and to enable young people to participate in decision-making process.

This paper reports the outcomes of a project that has aimed to inspire ordinary young people to develop their media literacy skills through critical media analysis and media creation work. Young people in this project, plan, design and upload short video productions online on the issues related to them such as stress and friendship. The project provides young people a means of expression and allows them to communicate to far broader audiences than they might reach in their classrooms. Selected young people in Penang, Malaysia participated in a series of media literacy workshops and used the visual medium as a tool for expression and reflection. The workshops heard their voices on old and new media, the ways they engaged with different programmes and saw their messages in video related to the issues of stress and friendship.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION:

The process of video production almost cannot help but contribute to the participants' media literacy. In making them 'writers' as well as 'readers' of the visual media (Buckingham, 1993, p.297), they come to understand the implications of how the mass media can represent any bits of the world in different ways, highlight them or leave them out(Gauntlett, 1997). The process of making a video project produces relationships with others and also importantly provides space for public sphere where young people can get together and freely discuss about their common issues and problems (Tyner, 2003). Niestyto et.al (2003) report that media production helps in learning about young people's views about a particular issue. Further, they argue "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 young people (p. 463)." In order to make the young people voices heard and to counter the dominant representations created by the adults in their productions, young people should be taught video production skills to produce alternative representations of young people in narrative productions (Fleetwood, 2005). The increased access to media making tools among young people world over can develop transnational cultures among young people with their own distinctive practices, bodies of knowledge, conventions and lifestyles (Featherstone, 1995). Media educators should encourage media production activity that helps young people to learn about themselves and others.

As reported by Tyner (2003), studies on student's creation of multimedia have pointed out that when digital tools are used for hands on production young people are able to apply skills like critical analysis, critical thinking, synthesizing, evaluating knowledge and attitudes. Through media literacy production experience learners construct their own understanding through hands-on experiences that encourage the development of critical thinking skills and use authentic tasks of inquiry, reasoning and problem solving that reflects real world issues (SAGEE Project Report, 1992). Buckingham (2002) pointed out that it would develop the young peoples' creativity and it enables their voices to be heard and thereby providing 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 young people themselves. They are argue that young people who live in other regions and speak different languages are more effective at communicating with them, compared to the adults in their own country and even their own homes. In that sense, media production when uploaded in the web provides young people an opportunity to express more effectively their ideas and beliefs globally.

Burton (2005) stresses that media literacy training programmes should include teaching of elements of media language like elements of production, production conventions like fade in and out, low and high angles technical codes like training and composition, sound -track, media genres, formats, computer software types, games, educational and so on. Further, he argues that that teachers can help children develop media literacy from an early age by discussing still images and their meanings; photographs, street signs, logos, and the impact of color, body language and gesture. Similarly, Chen (2007) adds that as the power of multimedia is coming to the children it is necessary to teach them what screen direction is, what perspective is, what colors is, what a diagonal line means and so on. Burton (2008, p. 68) expresses that young people by doing media production “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.”

Niestyto et.al (2003) argues that the quality and style of student media productions or videos depended on the particular contexts in which they were produced and of the individuals or groups involved. In addition, they argued that the film language employed by the students in their media productions will depend on their social and cultural backgrounds and the form of cultural capital that is available to them. In terms of quality of the videos, the student videos will circulate as ‘video low’ (little technical expertise, considered more authentic) as defined by Fiske (1990) rather than as ‘video high’ (highly produced, mass distributed). In other words, the realness of the production and the authenticity of experience represented in young people videos will attract the viewer’s attention. In terms of modes of narrative or narrative style of the productions, young people seem to like the ‘open’ productions to ‘closed’ ones (Niestyto et.al, 2003). That is, if the message is bold and simple and did not leave enough space for self made meanings, young people often expressed disapproval. To sum up, in teaching media literacy if the concepts are thought through hands on production, the learning outcomes will be much higher in comparison to providing information through lectures.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The project has aimed to give voice to young people to explore through the visual media the issues concerning them such as stress and friendship. It is dedicated to the nurturing of young people as critical and creative video makers who will use video as a medium to express their ideas on issues concerning them. This project draws inspiration from Gauntlett’s work titled ‘Video Critical’ and absorbs central ideas and procedures stated in the study. Aiming to develop critical media analysis and media creation skills among young people in Malaysia, this project besides teaching media literacy concepts, also includes a video production project in the study. The various perspectives discussed in Gauntlett’s work were useful in guiding the project both procedurally and theoretically.

This project was carried out in three selected secondary schools in Penang, Malaysia. Young people aged 16 from four urban secondary schools in Penang, Malaysia participated in this research project. Each school nominated 20 students to participate in this project, thus a total of around 60 young people participated in the media literacy workshops conducted separately in each school. Selection of students was done on a voluntary basis with the assistance of class teachers. In selecting the students, care was taken to represent students from various races, gender and class structures of the Malaysian society.

The project consists of 2 phases that includes a research phase and a production phase. The research phase looks into young people’s perception and practices in relation to media. Focus group interviews were conducted to understand students’ views on television programmes with particular emphasis on issues related to stress & friendship, their media consumption patterns and their views on the influence of television and its representation of various issues related to them. In addition, towards the end of the workshop young people shared their views on video production experience. During the production phase, young people produced six short videos of around four to five minutes duration about the topic of stress and friendship in their lives with groups of nine or ten students, over the course of few weekly sessions. This paper directs attention to the production phase; it presents the summary of findings related to production theme and narrative analysis of the videos.

It is stressed here that the journey throughout this project has also enhanced professional learning views of the researchers. Witnessing the young people’s media productions affirmed our interests in promoting creative learning cultures using new media as these are absolutely vital to our future, in an economic, social and cultural sense. It is exhilarating to recognize the validity of these practices in the spirit of community engagement and participatory cultures and acknowledge young people’s right to have voices and to be heard.

SUMMARY OF MEDIA PRODUCTION WORKS – MEDIA MAKING ON ISSUES OF STRESS AND FRIENDSHIP AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN MALAYSIA:

One of the significant outcomes of the project is the production of short videos on problems faced by young people in their lives. The basic thinking behind this video production method is that mediated perceptions of contemporary society can be explored with the media tools of that culture (Gauntlett, 1996). The video production method provides subjects to be able to make a statement about society or experience through the video material they produce. However, Gauntlett (1996) reports that the video recording will not be ‘pure’ in the sense that it is affected by their experience of television and the popular version of the medium. In that sense, the data collected through video production also provides an understanding of television’s influence on young people towards the issues. Also the coverage of the individual video projects clearly shows the varying degrees of knowledge between the different groups in different schools.

Overall, the young people’s approach to video making is imaginative both in terms of content and presentation. The project participant groups decided on the precise focus of their projects and developed propositions as follows:

SUMMARY OF PRODUCTION THEME ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEOS:

Schools	Title of the Projects	Problem Identified	Proposition
Bukit Jambul school, Penang	▪ Sports Fever	Students hindered from pursuing own dreams due to pressure from parents	Being straightforwardly honest towards parents and persevere towards their own dreams
	▪ Stress	Ignorance and carefree attitude can lead to stress and failures in studies.	Students need to be more serious in handling their own responsibilities as a student.
SMK Convent Green Lane	▪ Friendship	The importance and strength of friendships	Students should always cherish the little moments in their friendships
	▪ Nothing can come between us	Mistrust can lead to friendship breakups.	Nothing can come between a strong friendship.
SMK Datuk Haji Mohd Nor Ahmad	▪ Avoid Stress, Prepare early	Lack of preparation can lead to stress and failure	Always prepare early to avoid stress in studies.
	▪ HIV	Discrimination and stress of a HIV victim	Being educated of the disease can lead to greater acceptance of HIV victims.

Based on the table above, what can be noticed is that there are groups, which identified similar problems that caused stress. One example would be that of the video titles “Stress” and “Avoid Stress, Prepare Early”. Both videos centered on the idea of ignorance towards one’s own responsibilities that ultimately leads to stress and failures. As for as the two videos that focused on friendship, both showed contrasting mood and tone in their work. One video showed from the angle of appreciation and happiness, another from an angle of mistrust and breakups. However both videos ultimately highlighted the strengths of friendships.

The main topics of friendship and stress all had themes that were centered on cause and effect. Young people were able to realize that stress can be avoided with a simple change of mindset, and that trust is key to having a strong and lasting relationship.

As the scope of filming was restricted to school premises, the issues discussed were student-centered and limited to local surroundings. Owing to that reason, young people probably were unable to expand the concept of stress and friendship beyond the confines of their own self-experiences.

SUMMARY OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEOS:

Narratives discussed here are in terms of how the story was told and presented. A common conclusion is that the ideas presented in the videos all reveal problems that students are facing today whether it is the issue of stress, or even problems in friendship.

Below is the discussion of some common elements or patterns that were found in their narrative style.

CONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURE:

All of groups wanted to demonstrate the rights and wrongs that could lead to problems in the areas of stress and friendship. By using three elements consisting of characters, dialogues and text, students were able to deliver their messages to the audience. The usage of dialogue could sometimes lead to an increased level of difficulty in recording and editing; some groups resorted to using text to provide extra information that proved important in driving their story forward. Conventional narrative structure was used in many of the videos with the setting of action, confrontation and resolution to create a cause and effect situation in the telling of their stories. Other narrative elements were used to enhance their story such as music, costumes, and properties.

OPENING AND CLOSING SEQUENCES:

A common element of almost all of the videos is the opening sequence. Many of the videos tend to use a long shot of the location along with the title caption followed by music. This clearly shows that young people are aware of the usage of the opening sequence in which they try to suggest to audiences the setting or location where the story is going to take place.

As for the closing sequence, out of the six videos studied, five of them presented a moral statement at the end of the videos either in the form of text, or dialogue. This suggest that young people are trying to ensure that audiences get the meaning of their videos through text or single line dialogues that pretty much summarizes the entire content of the videos.

CREATIVE USE OF TEXT TO DRIVE THEIR STORY:

One thing for sure is that all of the videos had a great level of reliance on text to drive their story forward without which their videos would not have a strong bridge connecting each of the different scenes that took place. In a nutshell, text was used in their plot points, opening and ending sequences. In the case of the video titled "friendship", text were even used as their primary source of storytelling tool as dialogue were only used in a minimal amount. This reliance on text could be down to the young people's inexperience in capturing action sequences using dialogue. On a positive note, text were only used as an enhancing tool and served the purpose of making the overall videos better rather than the other around.

CREATIVITY IN PRODUCING VIDEOS:

Creativity and finesse is part and parcel of a good video production. In this context, there was no shortage of creativity shown by the students to make their videos more appealing in addition to giving extra emphasis to certain scenes. For example, in the video "Sports Fever", a purple filter was added in editing to create a dream-like scene where the main character was shown to be dreaming, playing both the role of his mother and father. It is safe to say that without the filter, audiences would certainly be confused over that scene.

Music was also used to complement certain scenes to provide a much needed dramatic effect. Music from various free music websites and sample files gave a good layer of added support to give certain scenes emphasis. In the case of the video "Stress", they were able to use fast paced dramatic music to provide added

support to dramatic action sequences, and easy listening songs for a more relaxed scene. This comes to show that students do know how to utilise the power of music to create attractions in their videos.

Finally, the young people used all the various types of shots and camera movements, ranging widely from close-ups, to panning and tilting. Although not all of them know the dramatic implications of using those shot angles or shooting techniques, what can be said is that the young people have the knowledge that using multiple types of shots can make their videos much more pleasing to the viewers eyes and that of course it is part of the necessity in making a good production.

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS ON PARTICIPANTS' VIDEO MAKING PROCESS:

It was noticed during pre-production stage that majority of the participants showed a lot of interest in planning the story and building the action sequences. However, they had a lot of arguments and disagreement over finalising the ideas and action sequences. In general, it was observed that girls' participants in the groups gave more creative ideas for developing the story.

The other common element observed during the production was majority of the participants, irrespective of whether they are male or female showed a lot of interest in acting and they are excited about being in front of the camera. Similarly, it was noticed that girl participants from different groups were keen in preparing the costume, makeup, dressing for the cast and arranging the properties for the shoot. It was also observed that participants found it difficult to film the action from multiple angles; however, they realised its potential in the editing room when different shots were put together.

In the post- production, it was noticed generally across all the groups that boys showed more interest in editing than the girls in their groups. At the same time, many of them had difficulty in learning the editing software and in general boys showed more interest doing editing. Another common feature observed during post -production was majority of the participants were passionate about music and they brought in their own selection of music to accompany the visuals, which was quite interesting. Also it was observed that the participants, who showed a low level of interest while discussing issues initially, showed more interest when video was brought in.

CONCLUSION:

The main project objective was addressed, which is to develop creative learning cultures through media production among young people in Malaysia. For the vast majority of young people, who participated in this activity, the project has been a meaningful learning experience. The sense of empowerment and accomplishment that the young people felt upon completing their media projects and exhibiting it to their friends and relatives was satisfying. The key benefits of the experience are the learning of media creation and thinking skills, the enhanced understanding and appreciation of the visual media and an increased awareness towards issues surrounding them. The production process has enlightened them that all media texts are consciously manufactured. In addition, the project clearly shows that it is possible for young people with the help of qualified media advisors/facilitators to produce meaningful videos within a few days.

More critically, this also marks a change in the young people's media cultures where they progress from a 'sit-back-and-be-told culture' to more of a 'making-and-doing culture' (Gauntlett, 1996). This can be seen in the shift from television-watching to the more creative uses of interactive media, and also more broadly and in growing calls for change in the school education system (from a learning-for-tests culture to one which emphasizes creativity, questioning and exploration). Indeed bigger policies and government action on a big scale are critical in developing creative learning cultures anchored in media literacy. Creating and making media programmes can open up new perspectives, and reflecting upon things that we take for granted in our simple everyday lives and suggesting new ideas and ways of doing things.

It has been demonstrated in the production phase of the study that the media production work enables young people to voice their ideas, concerns and possible solutions they have about the issues concerning them. On the whole, participants of the project were able to realize the value of a creative project such as this, which has made them more media literate. There are many frameworks available for developing media literacy among young people; in this paper we have presented one such possibility in developing media literacy skills.

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