Developing Critical Consciousness Through Video Production

by

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Abstract

For many ethnically and socio-economically marginalized students in this country, the national public educational system is a failure. Students leave schools often without having been challenged to become independent and creative thinkers who question, discuss, and create. They are not given many opportunities to explore their lived realities in critical ways, to think about solutions to problems, and to challenge the status quo. They are not encouraged to develop a critical consciousness—a consciousness that allows them to see themselves as thinkers, to envision alternatives, and to make change. This thesis project is my attempt at correcting that.

I created a supportive, challenging, student-centered environment founded in constructivist cognitive science, that gave New York City pubic high school students the opportunity to create a documentary that explores an issue of importance to them. The project uses an inquiry-based methodology that encourages students to develop genuine questions for investigation and fosters discussion throughout all phases of production. Students combine their research with the exciting and empowering medium of digital video production, which offers limitless opportunities for experimentation and creative presentation of ideas.

I outline several criteria that I consider to be indicators of a developing critical consciousness. These include a person's ability to:

1. Validate her own ideas and experiences as "fact" and trust in those ideas
2. Discuss her opinions
3. Consider things from multiple perspectives
4. Offer challenging or differing opinions and substantiate those opinions
5. Ask questions of herself and others
6. Use resources around her to find answers to her questions
7. Imagine that change is possible

In my assessment of the project, I discuss the various degrees to which the students grew in these areas over the course of the semester. I recognize that it is impossible to prove that a student who, in ten years in a traditional school setting, has not had significant opportunity to engage in critical discussion, reflection, and investigation, can become critically conscious in just fifteen weeks in a creative, constructivist, inquiry-based setting. However, I contend that with exposure to and participation in the latter type of environment *over time*, that consciousness is indeed developed. Over the fifteen weeks of my project, I saw encouraging and heartwarming evidence of this.

Background

My thesis project is essentially about how to teach for critical consciousness. It is an amalgamation of constructivist, inquiry-based teaching and learning, project-based learning, and feminist/multicultural pedagogies. It values the social construction of knowledge and "knowing" as an act of personal discovery, honors all life experiences as valid forms of knowledge, recognizes the essentiality of art for human development, eschews oppressive power structures and hierarchies, and affirms the potential of education as a social change agent. It brings together these ideas with the power of video production to offer New York City public high school students a stimulating, supportive learning environment in which to develop their critical consciousness. Participants discuss issues and events in their everyday lives, study phenomena in their social environments, view and produce media, and use their discoveries as the source and subject of their work—a documentary about a social or community issue of their choosing.

The project does not exist within a vacuum. Many youth media organizations exist that try to promote social activism and that offer spaces for young people to voice their opinions and ideas. As well, many progressive educators have advocated for and created learning environments that use constructivist methodologies or feminist/liberatory pedagogies. I was fortunate to be able to complete my project at one organization, the Educational Video Center, which for the last twenty years has fused media production with constructivist and liberatory pedagogy. I did not create the Documentary Workshop program in which I carried out my project. I saw that the pedagogy and methodology that the Educational Video Center embraces are very similar to my own, and thought this would be an ideal site for me to conduct my project.

Problem

The problem has been stated and fiercely debated in a multitude of ways and venues, in the hallowed halls of the United States Capitol, in teacher education classrooms, in bound tomes on university library shelves, over lunch tables in school cafeterias, and in living rooms, front stoops, and street corners around the country. The nation's content-driven, standardized test-based educational system is a failure. It fails on many levels. The norm emphasizes memorization of decontextualized information and passive receipt of preconstructed knowledge, robbing students of opportunities to critically analyze and deconstruct experiences, ideas, and interactions that make up their everyday realities, to develop strong independent thinking and problem solving skills, and to develop a passion for learning. Robert Reich (1989) describes our current educational model as being like an assembly-line, where students learn "long lists of facts that 'every adult should know' and standardized tests produce robots adept at Trivial Pursuit but unable to think for themselves or to innovate for the future" (p. 100).

While students may be asked to make sense of and solve problems related to data that in many cases is far removed from their worlds, the problems and complexities of real issues present in the students' lives go undiscussed and unsolved. In some cases, this omission is deliberate, because bringing those real life experiences into the classroom may instigate discussion and critique of the very systems of oppression which work to uphold the status quo. Michelle Fine (1987) states, "In low-income schools both the process of inquiry into students' lived experiences and the content to be unearthed are assumed to be, a priori, unsafe territory" (p. 157-158). In other cases, the omission is not as negatively motivated, but the outcome is the same—whatever skills and knowledge the

mimeographed worksheets and cookie-cutter curriculum aim to impart is not transferred to anything beyond the classroom walls (Smith, 1986).

As Dewey (1964) says, “Knowledge can never be learned by itself; it is not information, but a mode of intelligent practice, an habitual disposition of mind” (p. 188). The current educational model does not encourage intelligent habits of mind. Some of the most fundamental components of learning—thinking, discussing, and creating—are completely absent in classrooms. Central to the thinking process is the asking of questions to one’s self and to others and the seeking of answers to those questions, either by one’s self or socially. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000) states that, “students engaged in a continuous process of education should be adept at asking questions about [and of] themselves” (p. 227). Freire describes the asking of questions as a creative process, rather than an “adaptive” one, wherein students are told answers which they accept or adapt to. Following this line of reasoning, Barell (1995) says, “Thinking is a process involving exploration and experimentation, with no guarantee of success. When we think, we are taking a calculated risk that might or might not turn out successfully” (p. 19).

The asking of questions and seeking of answers is also known as engaging in the process of inquiry. Central to the inquiry process is the creation of learning environments that foster the establishment of trust and intellectual risk-taking. This can only be done when the normal paradigms of power within the classroom are subverted—when the ideas that only one type of knowledge is valid, that there is a gatekeeper of knowledge, and that the gatekeeper is not the student, are banished. In the current educational model,

however, these paradigms are still very much in existence. This is characteristic of what Freire (1970) dubbed the “banking method” of teaching.

Discussion is one of the primary means of social construction of knowledge. Freire (1970) says, “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 81). In a discussion each participant shares information that she holds, and others respond to it, counter it, consider it, question it, debate it, add information to it, shaping and reshaping, placing and replacing the information into the various mental schema that they are developing. In the normal classroom setting, however, little if any discussion takes place. In these classrooms, the teacher talks and the students are talked to, fostering a teacher-student power hierarchy and the passive, non-critical learning posture that students assume.

Furthermore, the present educational system tends to widen racial and economic gaps in achievement (The Center for Education Reform, 1998), and fosters social stratification, aiding in the creation and maintenance of disenfranchised communities.

Freire (1970) speaks of *conscientização*, a consciousness that people reach as a result of learning how to read their worlds, and a tool that allows them to take their freedom. I have borrowed from his idea and from other critical educators (hooks, Cary, Greene, Giroux, and Dewey) to create my definition of critical consciousness: an empowerment that comes from engaging with the world as a critical thinker, and therefore as an active participant in knowledge creation, and therefore as someone who no longer simply accepts information and injustices as givens without alternatives. A person with critical consciousness has the ability to construct her own knowledge,

analyze the worlds around her, articulate her ideas about those worlds, and envision herself as a change agent.

In order to reach this consciousness, one must experience a holistic approach to education, very much unlike what characterizes the current national educational model. This holistic approach includes changing the way students perceive the information and media they encounter, changing the way they see their relationship with the teacher, changing how they see themselves as constructors of knowledge, and changing what they envision as their role, power ability, and relationship with the larger world. It is about re-envisioning themselves as powerful actors, rather than as powerless victims or passive people who only can respond and react to what is done and told to them. Maxine Greene (1995) states, “Once we see our givens as contingencies, then we may have an opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices” (p. 23).

Greene (1995) connects the power of education and consciousness with social change. She says, “…education should also be in the kinds of critical transactions that empower students to resist both elitism and objectivism, that allow them to read and to name, to write and to rewrite their own lived worlds” (p. 147). This sentiment is echoed by educator John Dewey (1960) in the statement, “Actively to participate in the making of knowledge is the highest prerogative of man and the only warrant of his freedom” (p. 192). Davis-Seaver, Smith, and Leflore, interpreting Giroux, state this connection even more concretely. “For Giroux, the dialogical and dialectical nature of the classroom combined with a classroom pedagogy that encourages questioning, challenging, and looking at issues from many perspectives built on the active, hands-on construction of

knowledge by the students themselves is one where our society restructures its future to a more democratic society" (p. 10).

Continuing with the critique of the traditional educational model, while rarely are students allowed to engage in constructive dialogue and think for themselves, even more rarely are young people given the opportunity to engage in producing creative work that explores and makes meaningful statements about their realities. Budget cuts continue to bleed the creative life out of schools, as the battle for standards-based and content-driven curriculum takes over the national debate. Art is simply absent in the academic lives of many students, and because it is often only accessible within elitist institutions such as museums and prohibitively expensive private classes, it is well beyond the reach of the more socioeconomically-marginalized populations.

Stanford professor Elliot Eisner (2000) says, "If they do anything, the arts embrace diversity of outcome. [The] arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world. This too is a lesson that is seldom taught in our schools" (p. 7). Art educator Richard Cary (1998) speaks of the power of art to help people develop critical consciousness. He says that art can "open access to, often obscure, inner realities and meanings" (p. 35). In this way, it helps us see different layers of society, which can then be deconstructed, through critical discussion, to reveal hidden injustices.

Tying all of these ideas together, it is clear that having opportunities to produce art and critically engage with real issues in a challenging, supportive, and student-centered environment is crucial for the holistic development of self-empowered, critically conscious, confident young people who can use their talents and resources to make

change. The project that I developed aims to do just that. In the next section, I describe the organizational setting, outline the general structure of the project, and justify my methodology, later evaluating it and discussing it within the context of traditional educational settings.

Program

This project involves a small group of high school students of mixed ethnicities, genders, and ages, and one facilitator/instructor, me. It takes place four times a week for fifteen weeks, or roughly one school-length semester. In each three-hour session, participants cycle through team-building theatre games, critical discussions, critical viewing, writing, and hands-on video production activities. These activities are facilitated using a student-centered, inquiry-based, feminist, constructivist teaching methodology and philosophy developed and informed by the writings of educational theatre, science, and visual art instructors, as well as educational theorists. I use a curriculum that I developed, which is derived in part from the work of previous media educators of the Documentary Workshop at the Educational Video Center (EVC) and teaching artists at New York University's Creative Arts Team (CAT).

The project takes place as part of the Documentary Workshop program at EVC. The Educational Video Center was created twenty years ago, as a place "dedicated to the creative and community-based use of video and multimedia as tools for social change and as a means to develop the literacy, research, public-speaking, and work preparation skills of hard-to-reach youth" (EVC mission statement). The Documentary Workshop has existed for the same amount of time and is an internship program that public school students can take for high school credit. Both EVC and Doc Workshop are housed in Satellite Academy-Midtown campus, an alternative high school in Manhattan. Doc Workshop instructors, myself included, must hold New York State secondary teaching certificates, and are employed as regular teachers by the New York City Department of Education. Because students receive credit for the program, they can attend during their normal school day.

As I designed the project, the first two weeks are introductory, focusing on building the familiarity and comfort level between the students and each other, the equipment, and language that will be used during the project. This is an essential first activity, because it helps participants feel that they are supported by each other, and therefore determines the amount of creative risk-taking done. Adolescents are naturally more inhibited, due to self-consciousness stemming from fear of being negatively judged (Frankel, 1998). In order to work through that initial tension and to get them to a level of comfort, we engage in structured "play" time. They have to use collective creative problem solving to figure out how to compose certain camera shots, and they have to do some theater games. The games require the students to accomplish a number of things collectively, which gets them to begin working together, compromising, discussing, and developing strategies to solve problems. The games also require physical movement, which gets the students out of their heads and lets them relax.

I have observed this approach being successfully used in the CAT Youth Theatre rehearsals. Youth Theatre participants, who come from backgrounds and ages as diverse as the participants in my proposed project and who do not know each other at the onset of the season, begin to establish an amazing level of comfort with one another because of the laughter, physical interaction, team work, fast pace, and generally low-risk nature of the theater games.

From the very first class, the climate is developed that I want to hear what they have to say, that I expect them to solve things for themselves, that I am genuinely their advocate, that I want them to have fun, that what they say matters, and that this class is about them. It is important to establish this at the outset, because as I have discovered in

my years of teaching, and has been described in teacher training literature (Wong, 1998), the tone that is set the first day in many cases determines the rest of the year.

Along with the theatre and camera composition exercises, the first two weeks begin discussion of major social issues. Drawing from their own experiences as well as from news headlines, music videos, song lyrics, and other common media, I help the students identify themes, which are then isolated and used as subjects for subsequent mini-production projects. These mini-projects have a dual purpose of teaching specific technical skills—such as story-boarding, logging, and shot composition—and deepening thought and provoking questions and ideas about the issue.

In his writings, educator John Dewey (1964) states that all things must be taught within a social context and be seen as immediately relevant, not abstracted from real life experience. I use the students' interests and experiences as the start and center of the work for several reasons. It helps to erase the hegemonic power relationships of traditional learning environments, and the self-silencing that many especially low-income and students of color engage in, wherein they do not contribute to discussions or feel that their experiences are valid as compared with students who resemble the traditional power brokers (White, middle to upper class, standard English speakers). Florence says,

> An elitist education alienates students who feel the need to subordinate their primary cultural traits and characteristics in order to assimilate prevailing modes of knowledge and feeling. The process "silences" students whose ways of being, feeling, and knowing differ from prevailing modes (p. 103).

bell hooks concurs, "Focusing on experience allows students to claim a knowledge base from which they can speak" (p. 94).

During the next two weeks, we venture out of the classroom and into "the field", visiting performance spaces and museums where work related to our topics is exhibited. We also watch student-produced and professionally-produced videos pertaining to the themes. Mark St. John (1998), discusses this essential component of inquiry-based learning—the engagement of all participants in a shared experience that serves as the point of reference for subsequent investigation and work. The experience makes discussion real, rather than abstract, because students are talking about things that they actually experienced with their own senses—people they saw, sounds they heard, odors they smelled, etc. It also opens up the space for multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon, which makes discussion richer.

Any ideas that resonate with the students after the field trips and video viewings are further discussed, and these ideas help narrow down a final documentary topic. During these topic development conversations, I use what is known in teacher circles as the KWHL method: What do you know?, What do you want to know?, How would you find the answers to your questions?, What did you learn? These are essential questions in the problem-based learning method, a type of inquiry-based teaching/learning practice, which is itself a constructivist learning method. We also use graphic organizers (Venn Diagrams, "T-charts", webs) to help process the information we are receiving. The graphic organizers are flexible, meaning that the information gathered and written is not fixed in stone, but is as flexible as our own thinking about it. Through these discussions, the students determine what the subject of their work is, and they are more likely to be committed to the work, since they chose it based on their own interests.

We then begin learning more specific editing techniques, and do critical viewings of short segments of various works, keeping an eye out for artistic elements (use of music, sound effects, images, digital effects, word art, dramatization, camera angles, etc.). I hold mini-lessons with Final Cut Pro, an editing software, to teach the students how to do certain effects, and they engage in a second small project using the effects that I just taught them. Each small project uses one primary effect, so that the students have a better chance of experiencing success with it. NYU Art Education professor Eve Eisenstadt recommends this approach, as opposed to letting students do anything for each project, for this very reason. Therefore, at the inception of each project, I demonstrate the technique in front of the whole group before they work individually.

To develop the students' own vocabulary and critical media literacy, when looking at other videos and when critiquing the students' work, I draw attention to characteristics such as: shot composition, bias, pace, visual/audio relationships, stories or narratives, and other elements that make the pieces successful. They gradually begin to be able to point out those things as well, and apply them to their own work. While they are working individually, I rotate around the room to give advice, to have "mini-studio conferences", and to help the students problem-solve. When doing art production, my goal is not to teach participants how to master a technique, but rather to expose them to a range of meaningful experiences in a supportive environment. Issues such as individual style, and artist process will be continually discussed so that the students know that they do not have to emulate the quick-paced MTV style of editing in order to be successful media makers.

They work on their small style projects full time until the fifth week, and engage in critiques of their work from aesthetic and thematic standpoints, using "warm" (positive) and "cool" (suggestions for improvement) feedback. This process of critiquing, a commonly used evaluation method in constructivist education circles, is another important way to get the students to voice their opinions about tangible things and to make abstract associations between images and ideas or feelings. The warm feedback allows them to give and receive praise—an important element of gaining confidence. The cool feedback forces them to find ways to articulate aversion and to constructively challenge each other. Together, the warm/cool critiques help the students to see and voice multiple opinions about the same work.

The constant engagement in dialogue about concrete and immediate things develops their ability to articulate their ideas about accessible topics. They gradually build to discussing issues and ideas that are more abstract, distant, and "universal". This is the direction of movement recommended by theatre educators Gavin Bolton (1984) and Christopher Vine (unpublished class lecture notes).

During week six, students define what their final documentary topic will be. They go out into the field again, this time to interview random people on the street about the narrowed topic choices. The educational theatre technique of tableaux, commonly used as a devising tool at CAT, is also be employed during this process to get students to explore topics from different points of view. From our discussions, we devise several guiding questions that will direct the students' thinking about the content of their video. This inquiry-based approach, advocated by Elenor Duckworth (1996) and Barell (1995), among others, makes the search for answers more genuine and meaningful. Barell says,

"Education for thoughtfulness is fostered whenever problems presented by teachers and/or students mean something to the participants. We must own the problems, make them ours" (p. 17).

Week seven is an intensive discussion and planning period. We brainstorm and begin researching all of the people and places that we would like to interview and tape, and we begin making calls to schedule appointments.

Weeks eight through twelve are the intensive production period, when the bulk of the interviewing, shooting, and editing takes place. The students put all of the skills that they have learned over the previous weeks into practice for their final project. As short segments are worked on, we have small group critiques, revision, critique, and more revision, until a final piece is ready.

Week thirteen is when the final video is screened. The screening is open to a community of family, friends, and the general public. This is important for celebrating and honoring their work as legitimate art worthy of public viewing.

In week fourteen, I hold individual appointments with students to help them collect their work and prepare for the final roundtable presentations. Roundtable presentations are a common method of assessment in alternative learning environments and are a core part of the program that Steve Goodman (1993), founder of EVC, established in teaching youth media. The presentations require students to share what they learned during the course of the project—what they found difficult, what skills or concepts they are most proud of gaining, how they see themselves using the skills and concepts in the future, etc. It is the time when they synthesize all of the learning that has taken place, and articulate it to a group of adults outside of the project.

Throughout the entire project, I facilitate class using constructivist teaching methods that I have culled from the writings of many of the educators that I cite throughout this document. Constructivism itself is not a specific methodology, but rather a theory in the world of educational psychology. Standing in opposition to behaviorism and maturationism, and credited to the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, constructivism proposes that learners actively construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world by creating schema, or chunks of information. These chunks shift, are broken down and are reorganized as new experiences (dialectical, literal, sensual) are introduced. Many constructivist educators and theorists put much weight on the influence that society has on an individual's schematic development, hence the large role that discussion has in constructivist classrooms.

According to constructivist educator Catherine Twomey Fosnot (1996), key characteristics of constructivism are: the sharing of ideas within a community of learners so that those ideas may be strengthened, changed, or developed more thoroughly; and the emphasis on experimentation with ideas through the asking of questions, the making of mistakes, and the challenging of assumptions.

Another key characteristic of constructivism is the emphasis on reflection. Fosnot states, "Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning" (p. x). Students might have opportunities to engage in hands-on activities, conduct experiments, or explore the world outside of the classroom, but reflecting on the activities afterwards is just as important as engaging in the activities themselves. Journal writing and discussion of process help concretize learning by giving students the opportunity to process experiences and think through ideas. Depending on the journal prompts, the writing helps students position or

reposition the experience into their schema. It is also an invaluable tool for encouraging what St. John (1998) calls *proprioception*, or knowing what you know. I use journal writing heavily during the beginning of the project, and always after a key moment in either the thematic development or the production of the documentary.

I also respond to the journals. This serves an important function, because it lets the students know that they really are being held accountable for saying something meaningful, and it gives me the opportunity to write comments and questions to push them to think more deeply about the subject or experience. Before I give them their first journal assignment, I explain to the students exactly what the purpose of the journals is—an opportunity for them to reflect on what they've done in class, and a tool for both them and me to assess their growth. As art educator Peggy Albers (2000) notes, it is very important to be up-front with adolescents about the use of the journals, so that they give appropriate and useful responses.

In addition to teaching within a constructivist framework, I use specific teaching strategies that encourage both critical thinking and risk-taking in the classroom. In his work, *Teaching for Thoughtfulness*, Barell discusses these strategies in detail. I will list some of them here, and in the next section will elaborate on how I used them. The strategies include: modeling my thinking process so that the students begin to incorporate it into their own thinking processes; setting high expectations for the work and making it clear that there is an audience for their work, so there is some accountability that they must take; listening to the students' ideas and thoughts and making sure that other students listen to and understand what their classmates are saying; posing problems and asking questions and having students do the same to each other; responding to questions

and comments with genuine interest and understanding; and fostering peer interaction, rather than setting up dependency on the teacher to move the discussion and respond.

While the cognitive science, methodology and pedagogy are central to this project, another core element of it is the use of video production, and more specifically documentary production, as the tool or medium of exploration. Critical consciousness can indeed be developed outside of an arts classroom, but the use of the arts in this context empowers students on many levels. Documentary production provides opportunities for infusing a multitude of visual and aural elements in a stimulating and engaging way. As it is a non-fiction but also narrative genre, it is an incredibly powerful way for young people to deeply explore the issues and realities of their everyday lives, to research those issues and learn from people engaged with or working to improve those issues, and to make statements about those issues. Students are producing something that can be shared with and enjoyed by others. As well, they are engaging in a creative process that is too often denied them in the public school setting.

Implementation

The students in the program were recruited in a number of ways. I wrote and faxed a description of the project to approximately 50 high schools in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. Internship coordinators and guidance counselors who received the bulletin then posted it, and interested students called me to schedule an interview. Some students heard about the program independently from students who participated in the Documentary Workshop in previous years, and they called or visited the office to make appointments.

The selection process was guided by a number of factors. I wanted an ethnically and socio-economically diverse classroom with a balance of genders. I wanted students who were not necessarily outspoken in class, as well as those who were not particularly politically-inclined or who already had a high degree of critical consciousness. I also wanted students with no previous video production experience. All of these things I assessed during initial intake interviews.

At the start of the semester, I had thirteen students enrolled in the class, three girls and ten boys. Recruiting girls has been a challenge for the Documentary Workshop instructors in the past, though I am not sure why. Within that group, all came from alternative public schools in Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, or Manhattan. Miguelina[*], Tamara, Demetrius, AJ, and Kyle were from Satellite Academy, a "second chance" school for students who were either discharged from other schools or had dropped out and made the choice to return to get their diplomas. Heather, David, and Steven were from City-As-School Manhattan, a school that offers students internships as the core part

[*] All real names of student participants have been changed to protect their identities.

of their learning experience. Ernesto was from City-As-School Brooklyn, which is part of the same program as its Manhattan campus, but which generally attracts more lower-income students and students of color than the Manhattan campus. Akash came from Brooklyn International High School, a school for recent immigrants. Shawn was from Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom Academy , a small "school-within-a-school" in the Bronx. Antonio and Jose were students at Vanguard High School. All schools with the exception of Brooklyn International use portfolios as one of the methods of assessment. Ethnically, Heather and David were White; Steven, Miguelina, Antonio, Jose, and AJ were Latino; Tamara, Shawn, Demetrius, and Kyle were African-American; and Akash was a recent immigrant from Bangladesh. Heather and David were the most socio-economically privileged students. The others lived in low-income neighborhoods around the city.

After the first two days, one of the girls, Tamara, who had a serious truancy problem that her school's counselor neglected to inform me about, dropped out. During the seventh week of the program, Kyle, who had been having fights with his mother and who had just been kicked out of his house, also dropped the program. Another student, Steven, who was a principal actor in a movie that had been released in theaters midway through the course of the semester, took a leave of absence to travel with the movie's director to promote the film. Though Steven returned to the program, his participation after his absence was minimal. In the end there were ten principal students: Miguelina, Heather, Demetrius, David, Akash, Ernesto, Shawn, Antonio, AJ, and Jose.

Structurally, the semester looked very similar to how I envisioned and described it in my proposal. The sequence of events was true to the plan, though many of the individual activities that made up that sequence were created very much in response to

the moment. I will describe the activities that I feel comprised the core of the project and represent the pedagogy and methodology that I espouse.

One of the questions that I asked each student as a part of the initial intake assessment interview was, "How often do you get to voice your opinion?" As a follow-up question to that I asked, "Do you think you get listened to enough?" Ernesto responded, "[I don't really get to voice my opinion] outside of school, because people aren't trying to listen to you. I feel like people don't really care about what you have to say." That sentiment was echoed by other students. "A lot of people don't want to hear what you have to say. Especially, they see a kid…they're like, what does he know?" Heather said, "I've always gone to alternative and open schools all my life, so we have a lot of discussions and stuff. I feel like I've always had the chance to talk about things, and I think the teachers have respected my opinions." Aside from Heather, who was one of the more politically and socially aware, as well as one of the more critical and articulate participants, the other students never really previously saw themselves as part of the larger social discourse. Repeatedly, they expressed this sentiment, a major implication being that since no one cares, what's the point of doing the talking?

It was important to immediately set a counter tone for the semester—to make my pedagogy known up front, so that they know that not only in this classroom do they have permission to think, speak, and question, but also that I am holding them responsible for doing so. The first activity of the semester proved this. Ostensibly it was an introduction to camera techniques. Whereas in most classes the teacher simply tells the students where the parts of a camera are and what the types of shots look like, I gave the students the cameras and had them go around the school in groups to practice getting some of the

shots. I told them to be as creative as possible, to rotate the usage of the camera, to have fun, and that we'd look at their work at the end of the class time. While they shot, I walked around and checked in on them to help with any technical problems that they might be having. Some groups were timid and just went through the sheet, quietly getting the shots and passing the camera. In other groups, however, the students were more energized and playful. I heard them asking each other questions and making suggestions,

> "Hey, let's go up to the office and get shots of the people at their desks doing work."
>
> "Oh, look, there's a stuffed monkey. Let's get a pan shot of that."
>
> "Wait, how do you zoom, again?"
>
> "What if we do like a little skit where someone is following you, like you're a killer or something, and we get an over-the-shoulder shot of it?"
>
> "I don't know. Let's try it."

When we came back as a whole group to view their work, they all seemed interested and excited about seeing what each other produced. There was laughter and some comments of support: "That was a good shot." "Where did y'all find that monkey?" I made comments, too, and made sure to say something genuine and positive about at least one of each student's shots, so that they would feel success, especially those students whose groups were more quiet. It was important for no student to feel that they had failed because they were not as creative as other students. I continued this practice throughout the semester.

From this first activity, the students saw a number of things: that they are expected to problem solve for themselves, that they *can* problem solve for themselves,

that asking their peers (as opposed to the teacher) is a good place to start problem solving, that their ideas are validated by others, including the teacher, and that the teacher supports and encourages their work and their ideas. Also on this first day I introduced another important component of both the project and my methodology—self-reflection through journal writing.

I followed this up the next day with the introduction of their first camera and editing mini-project. I chose to center this activity around the activist work of the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords, in order to introduce the idea of social change shaped by young people. I first began the discussion, gathering from the students all of information that they knew about the two groups. “Who has heard of them? What did they do? What other information do we already know about them?” This validates the knowledge that they already hold and establishes that they can inform and teach each other—that I am not the only teacher in the room. We then read both groups’ 10 Point Plans. Again we went around the room collecting what the students understood from the texts and thinking about the points in relation to their lived experiences. “What were the main things these groups were fighting against?” “What things were controversial to you or you didn’t agree with?” “Are any of these things still problems today? Why do you think that is?” I then asked them to separate into groups, which I had pre-determined, to create their own 10 point plans—things that they would like to see changed or would want to change if they had the power.

It was interesting, because this was the first assignment where they are forced to talk, and then to talk about their political views, and some students were at odds with others. Because the plans were joint, they had to discuss and had to compromise in some

way. One group had David, a student who described himself as apolitical and who only wanted to deal with “fun” things—nothing “serious”. He felt comfortable expressing his views, but his other group members didn’t think that his ideas should go on the plan, because they were not as important as other things. His issues were more related to the treatment of youth, and included things like lowering the drinking age to 18 and getting rid of dress codes in schools. Another student in the same group, Akash, is an immigrant from Bangladesh who was in his last year of high school. He felt very strongly about getting rid of the ban on giving college financial aid to immigrants and denying health care to undocumented immigrants. David and Akash argued vociferously about the issue. David felt like undocumented immigrants shouldn’t even be considered people, since they’re here illegally. At my suggestion, they agreed to disagree, and decided to compromise by putting everyone’s issues on the list, but being clear when they presented them to the larger group that not all of them agreed with everything.

This activity served as a good springboard to begin talking about the issues that would later shape their documentary. Once the students presented their points, I had them then think about how they would visually represent the ideas. I selected one point, “There shall be no blood for oil,” and asked how they would convey this idea using only images, with no sound. The only audio would be the words of the point. One student said, “We could show an army in the desert fighting.” “That covers the ‘blood’ part, but how would we understand that they’re fighting for oil?” I asked. Another student suggested, “Well, we could have, like, soldiers fighting in a gas station instead of in the desert.” “Oh, wait, how ‘bout this… We could have a man at the gas station pumping gas into his car. Then in the next shot, instead of gas dripping out of the pump, it’s blood.” The students liked

that idea, so we began to storyboard the scene, shot by shot, using the terminology that they learned during the first class. When I felt that they had an idea of how to proceed, I had them in their small groups come up with images for the rest of their points.

David, who I sensed had been feeling a little outcast because of his views, turned out to be a skillful drawer, so his group members asked him to be the storyboarder, a role which he accepted proudly. The groups took to the task of creating images really eagerly. They were all trying to come up with ideas, making reference to music videos and commercials that they had seen. They began suggesting scenes that would take hundreds, if not thousands of dollars worth of props, equipment, and actors to execute, so I problematized their task more by adding the constraints of human resources, money, and space. They could only use themselves as actors, props that we already had in stock, and locations within a two-block radius of the school building. Those constraints sobered them, but they accepted the challenge and began to walk around the building to seek out ideas and materials. There were no silent observers during this process. Everyone was engaged with the task, if not as the person who thinks of new ideas, then as someone who gives feedback to an idea already offered.

Once the images were created and the storyboards drawn (or at least partially conceived if not fully sketched), the rest of the first week and the second week was spent shooting and editing their ten-point plans. I taught a mini-lesson introducing them to the editing software that they would be using, Final Cut Pro, and instructed them on how to execute the program's basic functions. The ten-point plan activity, therefore, was designed to not only have the students begin interacting with each other in a creative context and discuss issues of importance to them, but also to get them familiar with the

technology that they would be required to use when producing their group's final documentary in the weeks to come.

During the end of the second week of class, the National Moratorium to Stop the War on Iraq took place. I found out about a series of events as part of the moratorium that specifically catered to students, and I knew from their 10 Point Plan activity that some of the students were interested in the war. I decided to take my students to two of the events as a "field" experience. Before departing, I explained what the event was all about, and distributed an assignment sheet to help guide their experience (see appendix A). I broke them into different groups to help them get better acquainted with other students and had them brainstorm questions that they wanted to ask participants in the events in order to find out more about the event itself, the war in Iraq, the participants' personal opinions and motives, or any other related information. We took cameras and microphones, and I instructed the students to rotate crew roles when conducting their interviews, as well as to complete the tasks on the assignment sheet. We then set out to a rally at Hunter College and a creative arts speak-out in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I let the students go about their tasks and mingle on their own, and collected their equipment before they left for home. We would debrief the event during our next class.

Prior to this, we had not discussed how to do interviews, so this activity also served as their first street interviewing experience. I reviewed the interview footage from the event and noted where students used good interviewing strategies as well as where the interview could have been pushed harder. During the next class, I showed segments of the tapes, which the students were excited about seeing, sharing my observations about their interviews. We developed a list of "interviewing do's and don'ts" based on both my

comments and the students' observations. As well, we discussed the things that they saw, heard, and thought about the events themselves. Those students who didn't really know that much about the war learned about the issue, and all of them learned more about the organizing that was being done both in opposition to and support for the war. They said that the responses that they were getting from their interviewees piqued their curiosity to find out more about the government. They wanted to know, "Where does all the money the government collects in taxes really go?" "What were the real causes of 9/11?", and in general, they became more questioning of what they are told by the media about the government. All of these ideas were added to a running list of possible documentary topics.

During week three, after the first video and editing mini project was completed, we began to view other student-produced documentaries. I used the standard viewing procedure that the Educational Video Center developed and practices. Students break apart a documentary according to its video and audio elements, as well as around what driving questions the video was made. In analyzing the video in this way, the students learn the language of media production, see its possibilities, and see the potential that it has for manipulation of original content. They also learn the importance of having multiple perspectives in the documentary. They pointed out that the producers used multiple interviewees from a variety of organizations representing different viewpoints, and understood how this strengthens the tape. We viewed *Through the Eyes of Immigrants, The Quest to Express, Waiting to Inhale*, and *Crack Clouds Over Hell's Kitchen* (all produced by and available for purchase through EVC).

Using these documentaries as the starting point, we discussed and made a list of components and characteristics that good documentaries share. They arrived at these things through their own analysis, revising some of the characteristics when their classmates or I proposed opposing viewpoints. One student was adamant about the fact that a good documentary should be entertaining, and another student concurred saying that it should be funny. Other students disagreed, saying that some of the videos we had seen weren't funny, but they were still entertaining because they were interesting. "What made them interesting, as opposed to boring?" I asked. The students debated this, finally deciding that entertaining included a lot of things such as subject, use of personal stories, editing of long sound bites, good music, and sense of humor when appropriate. Because they composed the list and because they put a lot of thought in constructing it, they were made further aware that their own observations are valid.

Following the creation of their "good documentary" list, we began thinking more deeply about what they might want the group's final documentary to be about. In order to prevent self silencing that sometimes occurs within large group discussions, I had each student write independently about one topic they felt strongly about using the "Developing the Documentary Topic" sheet (see appendix B) that I modified from previous EVC workshops.

I then regrouped the students for the start of their second video and editing mini-project, a *vox populi* montage of quotes about one or several topics, culled from street interviews that they would have to conduct about the topics that their small groups were to select. We reviewed some of the good interviewing strategies that we had discussed after the moratorium event interviews, and in their small groups, the students selected a

topic and created new questions for street interviews. We then hit the streets to begin seeking out interviewees. As I describe in the evaluation section, the street interviewing process is an exercise in critical thinking "on its feet". In some cases the students relied on and did not stray from their written questions. In other cases, often after an initial nervous interview, each student began to open up, really listening to what their interviewees were saying, considering what they were saying, comparing their answers to what the students themselves believed, and offering follow-up questions to challenge the interviewee or elicit more information. Upon returning from this outing, the students commented that they were both invigorated and intimidated by the process. "It was hard to think of something to say back to the person. I got stuck, and then I felt stupid, like 'um, OK, I guess the interview is over,'" admitted Miguelina. David said, "Man, this one guy didn't know what he was talking about. I asked him one question about cloning, and he gave me one answer, then when I asked him another follow-up, he gave me a completely different answer! He was all confused."

After interviewing and logging the interviews (writing the responses verbatim so that the group would have a record of them to use while editing), the groups had to then read over the logs of all of the interviews and select sound bites that they felt were poignant. They cut the selected quotes from the log sheets, and as a group had to arrange them in an order that they felt made a statement about the topic or topics. We viewed *vox populi* montages of other student-produced and professionally-produced videos and discussed how the editors arranged their quotes and what effect the arrangement had on the viewer's opinion or understanding of the issue. I introduced the use of text graphics as the technical skill for this project, so a new element was added for the students to think

about—how to use both their own text alongside of the selected sound bites to create a statement.

One group completed both the selection of quotes and the editing of this second mini-project quickly. They used only one text screen to introduce their topic, and chose to make their piece about just one topic, cloning. This group was extremely talkative during their planning and editing stages, but their banter was mostly unrelated to anything we had been discussing, and was instead about music, movies, and other adolescent interests. When I tried to challenge them to think of using text to add commentary, or to add another section of quotes about another topic, they declined the suggestions. Another group, however, was not talking about social things, but rather was really focused on figuring out how to arrange the quotes and how to use their text to add new layers of meaning to the quotes. Their planning stage took almost two whole class sessions, and they chose to stay late to finish the computer editing. The third group was somewhere in between—chatting with each other as they worked, but producing a thoughtful piece with good use of point/counterpoint and memorable quotes.

When all projects were completed we had a screening of their work. This was our second screening, but the material we were working with was quite different from the highly visual 10 Point Plans that we viewed in the first screening. The *vox populi* montages were more like the kind of work they would be called upon to do in their final documentary. In their critiques, I asked them to pay attention to the content and organization of quotes. What message or statement about the subject did they think the producers were trying to convey? What do they think were the criteria that the group used to organize the quotes? How did the titles affect the sound bites? Did the titles add new

meaning? Did they clarify the meaning? What changes or additions would they recommend? Rather than giving general warm and cool feedback, they had to give specific constructive criticism. “It was good. You made it seem like people were saying things they didn’t really say. Our group used some of the same quotes, but the way you chopped them up and put them together was nice.” “I don’t know. I noticed the same thing, but maybe it’s not so good to kind of like manipulate what people are saying, you know. Because that’s what the media does, and they be trying to twist things all around. So I don’t know…”

In my proposal, I envisioned the third and fourth weeks of the project to be spent viewing videos and being out in the field. However, while we did do a lot of viewing activities, we only went out into the field twice. The first was to the Iraq war moratorium rally. The second excursion took place during the fifth week, and was a trip to the Lower East Side of Manhattan to observe a neighborhood undergoing gentrification. During the creation of the 10 Point Plans, one of the students mentioned that he lived in the Lower East Side, and that he noticed a lot of gentrification happening. Most of the students were not familiar with that term, so after he explained it, several more expressed interest in it. I thought that a neighborhood visit would make a good excursion, because it is something that is very visible and could spark a lot of subsequent discussion.

Before the class’ visit I took a trip to the neighborhood myself, to see what sections I wanted them to explore. I chose three parallel streets as areas 1, 2, and 3, and told the students to walk north and south nine blocks on each street to record their observations. I did not tell them that we were going to observe gentrification, but rather that we were going to do a neighborhood study, similar to a community mapping

exercise. The students could focus on either the stores and businesses, the people, the housing, or the services. Each category had a different set of questions to guide the observation (see appendix C). Also, each student was to create questions and interview at least two people about the neighborhood. Each student took only a clipboard with the observation grid and their questions on it. I did not have them take their cameras with them, because the cameras are sometimes distracting to the students and off-putting to potential interviewees. I felt that the absence of the cameras would let the students focus on the observations.

Although they did not know that gentrification was the hidden subject of the study, after walking through the areas that I had identified, the students came to their own conclusions that that was what they were seeing. Several of the people who they interviewed also identified it as a problem, either using the term gentrification or just describing the phenomenon. When we returned to the classroom the following day, we debriefed the experience. The students noticed racial and class differences across the areas, differences in the types of stores and the prices of food at the restaurants, prices of rents at the local real estate agencies, the number of renovations or lack thereof, and the green spaces in the area. That excursion served as a good discussion stimulant and raised a lot of questions. The students wanted to know where else this phenomenon was happening, where all of the people who get displaced end up moving to, and whether the people who owned the stores in the neighborhood also lived in the neighborhood. It also made them think about their own neighborhoods in comparison. When it came time to choosing a topic for their final documentary, however, they felt like they had already

learned enough about gentrification, and they were tired of discussing it. It did not carry enough excitement and interest for them, and for some it was just depressing.

During week six, it was time to decide on what the final topic would be. We had discussed and discussed, and many of the original ideas either had been talked into the grave, or were abandoned because they did not meet the criteria that the students had developed for what would make a good documentary. Because we had been doing so much vocal group discussion, I decided to do something different. In theatre groups and community-building circles, I had seen an activity used called the “graffiti board”. This was a previously unintended exercise, and the reason I decided to use it is that it gives a space for silent discussion.

I put sheets of newsprint on the walls, each with one of the remaining topics written at the top. I gave the students four questions to answer at will on each of the sheets: Why would someone need/want to see a documentary about this topic? What’s so interesting or controversial about it? What would you want to find out about this topic? Who can we interview? I told them to respond to any or all of the questions for any or all of the topics, and that the goal of this exercise was to help fully develop all of the topics so we could make a more-informed decision. Since everyone is writing on different sheets and since no names are used, students could be free to write what they really wanted write. There is no pressure to say the “right” thing, no judgment is taking place, and they could do it at their own pace. They could also respond to whatever they wanted to respond to, read what other people wrote, and let themselves be influenced or be unaffected by the previous scribblings. Just as in verbal discussions, I also participated in this activity as an anonymous scribe, so that I could add comments and ideas that others

could work from. From this exercise, a very thorough list was developed for each topic, and the students got more excited about a lot of the topics. Included in their final list were: the intersections of music and politics; the Patriot Act and restrictions on privacy and personal freedoms; how tax money gets spent by the government and why it's distributed in the way it is; the conditions of the working poor and how people can work but still be poor; youth entrepreneurs; youth activism; and unemployment due to the recession.

The day after the graffiti board activity, I had the students discuss each topic's pros and cons, with regards to which would make a stronger documentary in the time frame that we had. The conversation was centered around how the topic would or would not make a good documentary, rather than around a discussion of the topic itself. A lot of critical thought went into the consideration. The students began to talk about things like bias, slant, conflict, timeliness, interest to other young people, social urgency and importance.

After a series of two consensus votes, the students finally decided on youth activism as a topic at the end of the sixth week. I thought we would be able to immediately move into the creation of subsections of the documentary or establish the line of inquiry. However, I noticed that there were several students in the class who became extremely silent and withdrawn. I sensed that they didn't feel connected to the topic—that they had chosen it because they thought since some of the more vocal students wanted it, that they should want it, too. So rather than moving on to my previously planned next sequence of activities and risk further alienating a third of the class, and rather than doing a re-vote, since I felt like the topic could work and that the

students could find a place of connection and interest in it, I decided to begin the topic with an exploration of the enormity of the term activism.

I knew that several of the young people were fans of hip-hop, and I had just read an interview in a magazine with a popular underground hip-hop group called dead prez [sic], whose lyrics are very political. One of the other topics that the students were interested in had to do with politics and music, and several of the students were disappointed that it did not get selected as the topic. So I wanted to pull that issue into the picture, since it definitely lay within the scope of activism. I photocopied the article and we read it as a class. I did not introduce the group as an "activist" group, though. By reading the article and discussing some of the points that the musicians made in it, the students came to see that on their own. Some of the students were fans of the group and were excited about reading about one of their favorite hip-hop groups in class. When they connected activism with hip-hop, they became more interested in pursuing the topic.

We began putting together a working definition of activism. I gave several scenarios and asked the students if they considered each to be activism. They generally considered all of the scenarios to fit, and so their final definition was very broad. This was good, because it was wide enough so that they felt like the topic could go in more places than just a look at rallies and protests that many of them still did not relate to. One of the students, who turned out to be a key voice in shaping the project, asserted that activism is a white upper class phenomenon, and that poor people couldn't be activists. I asked him to turn that assertion into a question. Did he know that for sure? What about the Black Panthers and the Young Lords? I showed them two documentaries that were made by members of those groups. Did they see themselves as having similar

socioeconomic status as the members of those groups? Were the young people in those groups activists? How were the groups able to do what they did? How did that activism differ from the activism they see today? What accounts for that difference?

We listed out some of the stereotypes that they had of activists, and turned those into questions that we would explore in the documentary. The questions generated more questions, and we were well on our way to creating subsections of the documentary. They decided that their final documentary would explore: what "color" the youth activist movement is; the degrees or levels of activism; the effectiveness of youth activism; the history of activism; music as a tool for activism; the youth anti-war movement (in the context of the impending war against Iraq); what youth activism looked like in other countries; and youth activism in favor of the status quo.

With that huge list of subsections, I began doing research to find interviewees and information to help answer the students' questions. I used my mornings before the students came to class to make telephone calls and do internet searches, and managed to track down Maya Enista, one of the East Coast representatives for MTV's Rock the Vote. I thought that getting a young person from MTV would further hook the students on the topic. As it turned out, not many of them had heard of Rock the Vote, and some did not consider the organization's goal of registering young people to vote to be a form of activism. They read about both the interviewee and the organization online, and came up with a list of questions for her. Some questions were things like: what is it like to work for MTV? But other questions illuminated their skepticism about voting and their lack of faith in this very traditional civic rite: What's the big deal about voting? What's your personal motive for doing this? Like, why are you *really* involved? What changes have

you really effected by registering thousands of young people to vote? What impact do the youth really have? Have any laws actually been passed or changes been made because the youth have voted for them? Don't you ever get discouraged that what you're doing is ineffective and that voting isn't going to change anything?

During the same week that we interviewed Maya, we also had an interview with Zara Khan of SLAM!, a radical student activist organization at Hunter College. In this case, it was two students who initially had made contact with Zara. On the day of the war moratorium, the two had met Zara at a rally and got her information, because they thought she was an interesting person. They gave me the information with their other assignments, and after they had all selected the topic, I called Zara anticipating that she might be a strong interviewee for the documentary. Again we read about SLAM! and about Zara, and the students created questions. But this time their questions focused more on the issue of the involvement (or lack thereof) of people of color in activism, because they learned that SLAM! is a controversial student-of-color-led organization on Hunter's campus. The class traveled to SLAM!'s office to conduct the interview, and there we also met some of the other members of the group. The students seemed captivated by all of the revolutionary political posters on the walls, and excited by the energy of the young people in the office. The SLAM! members took the students on a tour of Hunter's student union building, pointing out and explaining some of the personalities (Angela Davis, Fidel Castro, Mumia Abu Jamal) and events on the posters that plastered the hallways. My students had never heard of most of the things that they were being told, and some of them came back to class the next day talking about how ignorant they felt about the world and how angry they were at their teachers for not having ever told them that history.

After one more outing to a youth activism conference at Columbia University, my students decided in week eight that they wanted to go to other high schools and interview random students about activism. They felt like they had been interviewing people who were socially and politically active, but that these people did not represent the majority of youth. They wanted to hear from people like themselves, predominantly lower-income, non-college, non-active students, who they felt made up the true face of youth. They wanted people to express the real obstacles to being activists, in order to, as I see it, validate their own experiences.

I took this as a sign that they were beginning to narrow down their original huge list of documentary subsections to focus on a particular line of inquiry and an audience. So at the end of week eight, before their spring break, I had the students identify what they felt the goals of their documentary should be. They all seemed to agree that not being active was not a commendable thing, but they wanted to validate and talk about the reasons why a lot of young people are not active. They came to a consensus on two major goals: to encourage young people to become activists and to show young people how they can be socially and politically active. In order to achieve these very positive goals, they decided that they needed to show: why young people are *not* active; how different issues affect young people on a personal level; the accomplishments of youth activists; the issues that young people are fighting for; young people's motives for becoming active; how marginalized people have become and can become activists; and the different types of activism that exist and the different ways that people can express their opinions.

Four years ago, another group of students at EVC produced a tape called *Made in the YouthS.A.*, about young people involved in the fight against sweatshops. I find the

tape problematic and ineffective on a number of levels, but I wanted to show it to my students so that they could critique it and so that their critique could inform their own tape. During the tenth week we watched it, and without me prefacing it by saying that I did not think the tape was strong, the students pointed out both positive and problematic aspects of it.

> "If I didn't know what the tape was called, I wouldn't have got that that's what they were trying to talk about. It didn't give me any, like, information in the beginning to set it up. I had to figure it out as I was going along."
>
> "They need to show a change. I didn't know if the kids they interviewed actually won anything—like did they get a sweatshop closed or something? What did they do, or are they just talking?"
>
> "They need more factual information. It was mostly people giving their opinions. Like, why should I believe what you're saying? You gotta back it up with some facts."
>
> "Yeah, they didn't have any expert interviews, except from that one guy—I don't even remember who he was. Who was he?"
>
> "They should have gone into some of the sweatshops to actually show what the conditions are like, instead of just using pictures. Because we can't see how bad it is there from them just talking."
>
> "It was good that they had those two people talking about how they didn't care. I mean, it was kinda messed up, because they were two of the people who made the tape, but it was good they showed both sides. You know? Because I would have been one of those people, too."

I wrote their comments on newsprint, and the next day had them review the comments alongside of the goals that they had established for their own documentary, in order to see how they might need to change their line of questioning or focus in the upcoming interviews. They decided that they needed more personal stories about how the interviewees realized that they needed to take a stand against certain things, more stories about what the activists actually accomplished, and information about some of the real injustices and inequalities that exist in society.

During the eleventh week, there were three interviews, all "on-location", which cut 75% of our class discussion time, but I used the one day that we were in class as a day to look back at the goals, the initial questions and subsections, and the interviews and information that we had gathered to date in order to plan and put together an outline that could guide the rest of the documentary. Some of their original sections were eliminated, others were expanded to make two sections, and all were ordered in a way that they felt would make good narrative sense (see appendix D). Then, each student chose the section or sections that they were interested in concentrating their energy on and that would become their primary editing responsibilities. Heather, for example, who had bought into the idea of the power of activism long before she came to the class, was really interested in showing the accomplishments of student activists in the past, whereas Jose was very much a skeptic and wanted to focus his attention on exploring the idea that it is only wealthy or privileged students who can be activists. In this way, responsibilities were delegated to ensure that all of the work would get done, but the students were not forced to try to make a statement about something that they were not invested in or did not believe.

The editing process then began in earnest. The students had to log all of the interviews that had been done to date, look through the logs to find sound bites that would go well with their sections, do book research to find historical information about youth activism, do internet research to find disturbing facts about social injustices to make their audience want to take action, think of b-roll images that would make their sections visually interesting, make “paper edits” (narrative outlines on paper), and begin to actually edit on the computers. (Wow!) I created individual production plans for each student to help keep them on task and to facilitate self-management of their sections.

Midway through this process, during week twelve, I felt that we needed to take some time to reflect on what we had learned so far, and to personalize the topic more. We had been learning about different types of activism, different issues, and the ball was definitely rolling in terms of production. It was important to synthesize all of the things that they were learning and apply the new information to themselves and to other situations. I decided to use a processing activity that I have seen in educational theater circles, a human spectrum. We did a “spectrum of activism”. I started by having the students line themselves up across the room according to how “activist” they see themselves. 0 represented the least activist, and 10 represented the most activist. I purposely didn’t tell them what constitutes “least” and “most”, as I wanted to discuss that after everyone placed themselves. I wanted to hear from them where they stood and why they assigned that role to that number on the spectrum. What makes an activist? What are the different levels of activism? Is activism only measured by one’s actions and by only a certain type of actions, or is it also in a person’s cognition and internal awareness? These were all questions that I had and that came out in the ensuing conversation. Most of the

students placed themselves towards the lower end of the spectrum. And without knowing what activities each other engaged in and really how activist they were, the students negotiated the line “in the dark”. They all seemed to use Heather and Ernesto as the measuring stick. Those were the two students who, over the course of the semester, became seen as the most “activist”. “If Heather is a 6, then I’m definitely a 2…”

After everyone placed themselves, I asked them individually to say out loud what number they stood at. Then I asked them to tell why they placed themselves at that number. As they began to respond, I wrote down their responses on newsprint. “I don’t go to any rallies.” “I only have time to take care of myself. I don’t have time to be bothered with other people’s problems.” “I talk to my friends about issues, but I don’t do anything about them.” “Talking about things doesn’t make them go away. You’re not an activist unless you actually *accomplish* something.” As the discussion ensued, more ideas were voiced, and the discussion gradually turned into a debate.

> “So you’re saying that if you fight against the government, or you put all of your time into fighting against something, just because you don’t win means that you’re not an activist? So then what are you?”
>
> “Well, yeah, but if you don’t win, then what’s the point?”
>
> “Well, you can’t win every battle, and if you’re fighting against something like slavery, or something that’s so big, maybe you won’t be alive when it actually goes away, but you’re still an activist while you’re alive.”
>
> “True, true.”
>
> “Damn, so what *is* an activist?”

> "Well, if you know about how messed up the world is, and you don't care, then that's like a 0. But if you know about it and you care about it, then you're like a 1 or 2. Even if you don't do anything about it, because maybe people don't know how they can fight against something, or they don't think they even have an option…"
>
> "Yeah, poor people don't have any time or power to fight for their rights. They're too busy just trying to survive."

I asked them where they would place some of the people we had spoken to in our expert interviews. Without hesitation, they placed Zara and Liz (see video in appendix) at 10. When asked why, they said: because they were organized in a group, they participated in events, they shared their knowledge with other people, they had a lot of passion for what they did, they accomplished things, and they devoted a lot of time to what they did. These all went on the board as factors that make up the activism world. I asked them how someone gets to that point. How does someone who is at a 0 or a 1 become a 10? They said that through experiencing some injustice or by reading, people become aware. Then they can talk to other people, and if they find out about an organization that already exists, they can join, or they can create their own organization. This brought up the issue of whether you have to be involved in an organization in order to be an activist. They concluded that you don't have to be involved in an organization in order to be an activist, but that there is strength in numbers, so someone would be more effective with a group than as an individual.

Later in that week, I had them synthesize the information they had gotten so far, by responding in their journals to the following prompt:

> From what you've heard from the people we've interviewed, what made them get involved? What do they say keeps them interested in activism? What do they say they get out of it? What are they specifically fighting against? How are they fighting against those things—what's their method?

I also had them write about their own involvement with activism, by asking them some of the same questions they had been asking other people over the course of the project. I felt that it was important for them to include themselves in this conversation, since they were producing a tape that was supposedly going to influence other young people like themselves. It would not be a genuine endeavor if the producers, themselves, had not even worked through and reflected on the same things they are asking their viewers to do. I also had the notion that some of their initial thoughts had changed through the process of making the tape, and wanted to see to what extent that was true. Finally, the self-reflection would be useful for constructing a narration for the tape.

During week 13, we had a "rough cut" screening of the final tape. This was the first time that the students were called upon to concisely articulate to an outside audience what their project was about, and to show their work for feedback. They gave an overview of their project and goals, described their outline and explained why they felt that each section was important for their goals, and asked the audience to pay particular attention to things they were frustrated with or needed suggestions for. The students facilitated the entire process and took notes as the audience responded.

From the feedback, it was obvious that there were many things that needed clarification—things that the students knew because they were the researchers and producers, but that did not come through in the tape for the audience. For example, it

was not clear what exactly the organizations did and what their methods were for getting their message out, and the audience was not sure how youth activism was being defined. It was also obvious that the audience enjoyed the topic and was engaged enough with the material to want to know more. They said that the interviews were strong, that the multiple perspectives shown gave a good sense of the varieties of activism and inactivism, and that the sound bites were compelling.

One of the suggestions that came out of the rough cut screening was to organize the documentary into sections according to the youth activist organizations, giving each organization its own section that discusses its goals, methods, accomplishments, and the participants' motives. I took that suggestion and made an executive decision to restructure the documentary along those lines, because I thought it would give the tape more fluidity and cohesiveness, and more importantly it would greatly ease the students' narrative task. Time was short, and we needed an easier way of weaving all of the pieces of the documentary together by the deadline. So during week fourteen each student selected the organizational profile they wanted to edit, and got to work. There were six organizations, a history section, a *vox populi* section, an introduction, and a conclusion to finalize.

Since there were not enough computers and cameras to have all students engaged with editing at all times, I pulled some students to work on crafting the introduction and concluding narration. They wrote drafts individually then shared them with each other and with me, and we collectively pulled the pieces that we liked out of each draft to make one final draft. By this time in the semester, they were able to decide on and organize the

videotaping of the b-roll for the narration on their own, so while some students edited, others were shooting these final pieces.

On the last day of the fourteenth week, we had another rough cut screening, this time just for ourselves. Everyone had to show their section to the rest of the class for feedback, and everyone was required to give feedback about each section. Because the students were very aware of the impending deadline, and because their narrative and technical literacy had improved so much over the course of the semester, they were able to give extremely constructive and useful comments.

"I think you should start the WBAI section with the quote you ended with, because it's more general."

"You need to shorten the last quote from Raptivism, because he's just repeating what he said before."

"Your out-point needs to be moved a little, because her sentence is cut off."

"It's hard to hear what Liz is saying in the sit-down interview. Raise her audio a few decibels."

"Cut out the part when the girl says, 'I'm a lazy person', because that kinda makes her look stupid."

After late night and full weekend editing sessions between the fourteenth and fifteenth weeks, on the third day of the fifteenth week the students showed their final documentary on the "big screen" at the Donnell Library's media center in midtown Manhattan. They had invited their teachers, parents, friends, and people who had participated in the making of the video. As well, the screening was open to the public, so there were some people in attendance who had absolutely no idea who the students were

or what their process had been. After the video was shown, the students came to the stage and answered questions from the audience. They talked about what the challenges of working in the group were, how they found the interviewees, how they felt about activism, what the most exciting part of the production process was for them, and what their future plans are, amongst a myriad other things. It was an incredibly moving experience that brought me to tears as the final credits rolled up the screen and as the students who I had been working so closely with over the past fifteen weeks were proudly, independently, and articulately sharing their thoughts with an auditorium full of people.

While the screening represented the official end of the production process, it was by no means the end of the semester. The students now had to go through all of the journals that they had written, the tapes that they had shot, and the interviews that they had done in order to prepare for their final roundtable presentations. I had given each of them a rubric that the EVC educators (myself included) created, which lists all of the technical and narrative skills that the Documentary Workshop students are expected to have gained over the course of their internship. The students had to take the rubric (see appendix E), look over their materials to find evidence of how their skills improved, and evaluate what they learned. I set up individual conference time between each student and myself, so that I could help them think through some of their ideas, offer suggestions, or point out areas that I think they could discuss. They put together a video reel that had interviewing, camera work, or editing “highlights” from the semester, and used the clips to discuss their skills. As well, they each wrote a cover letter that briefly walks their

roundtable participants through their production process, and an essay that discusses what they learned about the topic of youth activism.

Each student's presentation was attended by me, a representative from their school (in most cases their internship advisor or counselor), and at least one other media professional. Representatives from Global Action Project, Human Rights Watch, NYU's Educational Communications and Technology program and Media Ecology program, Manhattan Neighborhood Network, Downtown Community Television Center, and LoyalKaspar Design Company were among the other participants.

In hour-long sessions, each student presented and discussed their reels, took questions, received warm and cool feedback from the panel about their presentation and work, and responded to comments.

And then the project was completed.

Evaluation

In the design of my project, I identified five criteria on which I would evaluate its success. If a person with critical consciousness engages with the world as a critical thinker and has the ability to construct her own knowledge, analyze the worlds around her, articulate her ideas about those worlds, and envision herself as a change agent, I planned to demonstrate that students showed growth in their critical consciousness by their ability to:

1. Discuss their opinions
2. Ask questions of themselves and others
3. Consider things from multiple perspectives
4. Offer challenging or differing opinions and substantiate those opinions
5. Apply understandings of social dynamics in their immediate worlds to larger world situations and events

The first criterion has to do with students' ability to (a) simply have opinions and (b) be able to speak their opinions. The "opinionless" student, a common character in classrooms across the country, can be spotted when, in response to the question, "What do you think?" she shrugs her shoulders or answers, "I don't know". This response may be attributed to a number of things, including a lack of understanding of the topic or operational language. But when those things are ruled out or addressed by the instructor, and the response remains, the opinionlessness most probably stems from the student being scared to put herself and her ideas at the mercy of others, or from her passive, non-engagement with the material. Discussing opinions is one indicator of critical consciousness, because it is evidence that the student is actively engaging with information and ideas in the construction of knowledge.

Along a similar vein, the asking of questions is an indicator of active engagement, because it is the admission of an unknown or stems from an interest in learning another idea. In order for someone to realize that she does not know something, she must be processing the information, trying to fit it into the schema that she has created.

The third criterion is applicable, because if a person has the ability to see things from multiple perspectives, she recognizes that there is more than one truth. This does not necessarily mean that she agrees with other perspectives, but that she can empathize or sympathize with a different set of experiences and ideas, that she can follow different lines of logic, that she can envision alternatives. This implies, also, that she can envision change.

A person's ability to offer challenging or differing opinions and to substantiate those opinions is tied to both the first and the third criteria. While, as I explained above, the first criterion is simply about someone being able to have and state her opinion, this fourth criterion is about a person being able to engage someone else in a debate about their opinions. It is about someone being able to see something from a different perspective and be confident enough in her ideas to take the risk of diving into that living, dialogical organism to "hash it out". In some cases it is about standing up to and challenging a power structure, whether that structure be a person with some kind of deemed authority (like a teacher), or whether it be a commonly held belief or an institutional system (like segregation).

The fifth criterion is about someone's ability to extrapolate what they understand about one set of dynamics in thinking about another set. In Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking Skills, application of ideas is the highest level of thinking, beyond

comprehension and synthesis. If one can relate what they understand about their immediate world to something in the larger world, she can see how issues are linked or she can understand the nuances of her situation.

During the implementation of the project, I used four primary methods to obtain evidence of these five criteria: observations of students during class sessions, student journal entries, informal conversations with students, and roundtable portfolio presentations. In class I closely observed each student during the initial weeks of the project, taking notes on their level of participation in group discussions, their willingness to give their opinions, the kinds of ideas they brought up, and their knowledge of community or social issues. I continued notetaking for the duration of the project, and used the early observations as a baseline for later comparison. I also set up a camera in the classroom to videotape some of the sessions that I anticipated would be particularly key in the students' critical consciousness development. I used the videotapes to help me record specific quotes and conversations. Throughout the semester students kept production notebooks that included their journals, which I would read, respond to, and periodically photocopy. As mentioned in the previous sections, I was present during the students' end-of-semester portfolio presentations, during which I took notes and collected the materials that they chose to present.

In addition, as a sort of pre-assessment during the initial interview process before the first class session, I ask the prospective participants a few questions, in order to ascertain their level of critical consciousness:

1. How often do you speak in group settings? Is speaking up generally easy or difficult for you? Why is that?
2. When you're in class discussions, do you usually do more listening or more talking? Why is that?

3. How often do you get to voice your opinion?
4. Do you feel like you have a lot of important things to say?
5. Do you feel like you get listened to enough?
6. How do you feel when your ideas are listened to by others?
7. What issues or ideas are you passionate about? What kinds of things would you like to fight for? What would you like to change about society?

During this intake interview, I wrote their responses as they spoke, and put those notes in folders with the rest of their application materials.

While in designing this project I had intended to show that the students' critical consciousness developed, I do not feel that I have enough evidence to unequivocally prove that. I did not chart the quantity or quality of responses of each student in each class to have sufficient data for a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Nor did I develop a rubric by which to assess the growth of each student in each of the areas. My research science was not strong enough to make the claim that all students developed, or grew in all areas. However, I can say that during the course of the semester all the students *exhibited* all but the last criteria, and as I describe in this section, some of those moments were incredibly rich. As well, I do have evidence that some of the students actually did in fact develop in one or more of those areas.

Having said that, I still do believe that the project successfully accomplished the goal of developing the students' critical consciousness. It is my contention that *over time*, through continually engaging in the kinds of experiences that I provided for my students and from being part of the kind of holistic learning environment that was created, critical consciousness develops. I discuss this idea more in the analysis section of this document.

The activities that I described in the previous section, though not exhaustive of what took place during each class session of the entire semester, represent the nature of the whole project and the learning environment that was created. I will detail in what

ways the activities succeeded in encouraging development of the students' critical consciousness.

During the creation of 10 point plans at the beginning of the semester, several things happened which evince the criteria I listed above. The students were telling each other information they already knew about different issues. They were encouraging each other, helping to create an environment of trust and respect, "No, go ahead, say your idea. It sounded good." They were debating ideas—

> "Immigrants come here and go to elementary school and high school. And then when they apply to college they can't get any scholarships just because they're not citizens. But their parents don't make a lot of money, so then they can't go to school."
>
> "Yeah, but they don't pay taxes, and if you don't pay taxes then you shouldn't get money from the government."
>
> "Well, this country was made by immigrants' work, so they should get money just like everybody else."

They shared their own experiences about police harassment, being discriminated against because of how they were dressed or how they talked, and a multitude of other everyday occurrences. The activity lends itself well to this kind of sharing and debate, and since it is about what students would want to change in the world, it is a task that they get excited about completing.

During the phase of developing the prospective documentary topics, a lot of critical inquiry happens. During the 10 Point Plan project, Steven brought up the issue of gentrification. Most of the students did not know what that term meant, but when Steven

began describing it, they were familiar with it and had experienced it in their neighborhoods. They had never known that there was a word for it, or that it was even something worth fighting to change. Gentrification became an issue of major interest for a few of the students in the class, and when I had them do an in-depth topic development worksheet, two people chose that as a topic (though interestingly enough, Steven did not). The topic development worksheet forces students to actively take part in their own knowledge production, because they must articulate where their understanding gaps are (What do you want to know about the topic? What questions do you have about it?), they must identify how they think they could seek answers to their questions (Who would you interview? Why?), and they have to think about how their ideas would relate to others (Why would this be an important documentary for other people to see? Who would your intended audience be?).

Jose's questions about gentrification were: Why is it happening? What are some other examples of it NYC's history? Where are all the people who get pushed out of their neighborhoods moving to? Who is profiting from it, and who is losing from it? How is this going to affect NYC in the future? In identifying who could be interviewed for the topic, he said, " a person that recently moved out and a person that recently moved in could be interviewed", as well as "a landlord and a policeman (because they know what's going on in the neighborhood), a real estate person, and a big business executive". This shows his desire to get multiple perspectives of the issue. When asked why he thinks other people would be interested in the topic, he said, "because it is something that is affecting many people." This implies that he feels it is important for people to know about something that so many others are going through, also implying that if other people

know about it, it will be changed. For this same question, he also said, “because it shows how rich/politicians are always in control.” This is a statement of his own belief that rich people and politicians control everything, but it also implies when read with his previous statement that if more people know about the injustices of this issue, gentrification would not be allowed to happen anymore.

The practice of doing street interviews, because it is by nature a practice of inquiry and because it has the desired goals of getting interviewees to say a lot of information and collecting multiple viewpoints, becomes a great place to see the critical inquiry process live, on its feet. When the students use interviewing techniques such as playing devil’s advocate, where they necessarily must assume the position of the opponent, this process becomes that much more of a clear example of critical consciousness in action. Jose did an interview with three young men about marijuana legalization. Reading the log of this interview (see appendix F) one can see how Jose was really thinking through the ideas that the interviewees were saying and processing their responses alongside his own emerging ideas.

The spectrum activity was a great exercise in active and immediate social construction of knowledge through debating, offering and justifying different opinions, and experimenting with different ideas. In the exchange that I described in the previous section, it is clear that the students were considering what was being said in the moment and using it to negotiate ideas. Since there is no precedent for a “spectrum of activism”, since we were creating it in the moment, no one student was more knowledgeable about it than another. All students were on equal footing and were propelled forward together

towards a common understanding. They completely owned what had been discovered during that process, and were led to new questions through it.

When I took the students to the March 5th Moratorium Against the War, one student, Shawn, spoke to me privately and said that he did not want to go. He said that he was not so sure what his feelings were about the war. Most of the other students seemed to oppose the war, but this student said that he really didn't know anything about it. He was struggling with the feeling that everyone else was more "worldly" than him and that because he did not "know" about much, he couldn't participate in and speak about things. I told him that not knowing is a great place to start, because all of your questions are genuine. He was not convinced. To him, not being informed and admitting that you don't know something by asking someone else for information was a sign of weakness. Once the class chose the topic of youth activism, he again told me that he felt very apprehensive about his ability to participate in the documentary because he did not "know" anything about the topic. As the semester progressed, though, he became very comfortable with asking questions and more willing to trust his own experiences and thoughts as "knowledge". I would add this latter point as another criteria for evaluating someone's critical consciousness.

Shawn's journals are sincere and reflect a true growth. Watching him begin to come to critical consciousness over the course of the project was one of the most exciting. One of his earlier journals, written before we had chosen a final topic and after he had conducted the class' first "expert" interview with an editor from City Limits magazine, said

> You know honestly I wish Heather or Steven had done this interview, because they seem to be a lot more focused and I don't know, right for the job. Their social skills are way above mine. I believe the interview would have turned out much better if they had done it. I wish there was more that I could have given to the interview and the interviewee, because I didn't have any strong or solid background information on the questions that I asked. I feel that I wasn't into it as much as I wished I was or should have been. Most of what Annie said to me went into one ear and out the other.

In his final journal, which I have excerpted here, he wrote:

> When the Basic Doc Workshop and I first started working on the final project, some of us didn't have an idea on what the term activism meant. I was one of those people. I took an educated guess that was based in some of the documentaries that I had seen a couple of weeks before. I later realized that my definition of youth activism goes far beyond what I first thought it was. I was unaware that I was watching different forms of activism the whole time. The purpose of doing a documentary on youth activism [was to] get youth who are not active more involved with their community and other organizations that believe that even in today's world we are still oppressed (racism, segregation and police brutality), that believe the government is still telling lies (President Bush), that believe we as the people do have power, a voice that can be heard and will be heard. But most importantly, believing in change. Do you believe in change?

He went on to talk about some of the organizations that the group interviewed. "WBAI is a commercial free radio station that talks about political issues that is going on around the

world. I listen to WBAI all the time now. I even called there once to state my opinion on the war."

Because of the novice storytelling and technical ability that most of the students have as participants in the Documentary Workshop, the final product may look very traditional and dry when compared to professionally produced documentaries or video pieces. However, even with the traditional question-driven narrative and "talking heads-with-b-roll" imagery that characterize the final tape, there is an incredible amount of creative thought that the students put into the project. Each student was primarily responsible for editing one section of the tape, so they had creative control over how that piece would look. Ernesto and Heather collectively did research wrote the narration, and shot the footage for the segment about the history of student activism, but Ernesto edited it. Demetrius and Shawn edited the *vox populi* interview segments. Antonio edited the Rock the Vote section and took over the editing of the Raptivism Records segment when Steven was absent. Akash edited the Make the Road By Walking vignette. Miguelina created and edited the factual interludes. David edited the introduction. Jose edited the SLAM! section. And Heather edited the conclusion and Justice for Youth piece.

The students were open to suggestions from their peers and from me about which sound bites to include, which to remove or shorten, what b-roll to add, how to quicken or slow down the pace, or how to reorder the sound bites. Sometimes they would follow the suggestions without question, but other times they would argue for their choices and stand their ground. Jose was really attached to one of Zara's quotes in the SLAM! piece. I felt like the quote was a bit too tangential and suggested that he remove it. However, he felt that it really captured the essence of the organization's politics, and decided to keep it

in the final cut. Ernesto spent one entire class session listening to CDs and selecting short segments of music to match each of the decades that the history section discusses. He showed me his finished section, and I felt that all of the musical choices were perfect but one. I suggested that he try another song, and gave him a CD that I had that would "definitely work well." He listened to it, but decided that what he had already chosen was the best. Although I really did not think the music fit and was pretty adamant about my opinion, Ernesto did not flinch. Instead, he showed his section to the other students in the class for their opinion. When they gave him overwhelmingly positive feedback, he smiled at me, as if to say, "I told you so." I thought that these two occasions were examples of critical consciousness, because the students were extremely confident in their own ideas, and did not see me as the ultimate authority or as the only person with the right answers. They saw their ideas and the opinions of their peers to be just as valid.

Analysis

Through reflecting on the project, several of my initial thoughts about the characteristics and indicators critical consciousness have changed. Looking back at the original list of five criteria, I collected evidence of all but the last. While I think that being able to apply understandings of the local to the universal is an important skill for critically conscious people to have, I believe that one can be critically conscious without necessarily having the ability to extrapolate ideas in a broader context. It is a highly sophisticated cognitive ability that does not have to do with a person's engagement with the world as an active learner and thinker who understands that she has the ability to construct and deconstruct knowledge and truth, and change given realities.

Though I am removing one criterion from my original list, I would like to add several more that I previously had overlooked as indicators of critical consciousness, but that I noticed as huge triumphs in the classroom. They were the small steps that are actually giant leaps in the development of critical consciousness. The indicators on this new list are sequential, in order of what I see as the progress of this development. A critically conscious person can:

8. Validate her own ideas and experiences as "fact" and trust in those ideas
9. Discuss her opinions
10. Consider things from multiple perspectives
11. Offer challenging or differing opinions and substantiate those opinions
12. Ask questions of herself and others
13. Use resources around her to find answers to her questions
14. Imagine that change is possible

The last criterion is different from saying that a person sees *herself* as a change agent. I noticed that seeing one's self as a change agent was something that many of my students struggled with. It was fortuitous that they selected youth activism as the topic

when my project is so closely tied to social change and activism. The young people who my students met and interviewed for the documentary were living examples that change is, in fact, possible, and that people who look like my students are effecting that change. This greatly influenced the students' perceptions, yet even seeing youth activism in action did not completely convince many of the students that they could also be change agents. They seemed to struggle with the idea that young people, and especially individuals, can make a real difference in changing some of the larger social injustices that exist. In his journal, Demetrius wrote, "There is a lot of other problems in the world right now and there is nothing the government is doing and would do about it if I tried to make a difference. Nothing [can be done] if there is no help from the people." Even after having researched and met young activists, Demetrius did not see himself as becoming involved in fighting for change, especially if other people were not also involved.

They also struggled with figuring out how they could become involved in effecting social change. Many of the questions that the students created for their interviewees had to do with discovering what the young activists' "wake up call" was. They wanted to know what that critical moment was that led the interviewees from inaction to action, I am assuming in an effort to envision the possibility of the same for themselves. They had, at that point begun to be more aware of the injustices that surround them and affect them, and they recognized that activism was important, effective, and empowering, but they still felt that it was inaccessible for them.

Interestingly enough, in the self-reflection exercises that I had them do in week twelve, I discovered that many of them believed they were doing activist work because they were making a socially-relevant documentary. According to Akash, "Actually, me

doing this documentary makes me feel like I am an activist since we are expressing our opinions about different social issues. Just like us people (young) are active in 'endless' ways." The students just did not see the video as having enough impact to effect "real" or large-scale change, and their activism at EVC did not carry over into their other lives.

As I mentioned in the previous section, and keeping the new indicators of critical consciousness in mind, I believe that my project was successful to varying degrees. All of the participants experienced and exhibited all of the, now seven, criteria. The extent to which they continue to exhibit these things after the project has ended, though, is a question. Florence (2000), in her critique of the bell hooks' pedagogy, says:

> Developing and nurturing critical consciousness in students provides them with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully. In sum, hooks contends that education as the practice of freedom extends the teaching role beyond the mere sharing of information to a more holistic involvement with students (p. xxv).

So much about learning and development comes from the social environment in which it is done—the relationships that students develop with teachers and with each other, the trust that is established, and the support that students feel exists for them to take risks, fall, and succeed. This kind of holistic community empowers the students as much as the methodology and the medium do, though inherent in the methodology is the development of a critical and supportive learning community.

This holistic community was definitely established over the course of the semester, and from what I described in the previous sections, I think it is clear that my

project achieved its purpose of helping to develop young people's critical consciousness. There were areas where I believe the project fell short, though.

There were some sessions when I felt that because there was so much that I was trying to do, some potentially important moments were sabotaged. Getting students to write in their journals was a big challenge. I did not want to over-intellectualize the process for the students by having them write in their journals before and after each activity that we did in order to see how they felt their thinking had changed. This would have been an invaluable tool for me as a researcher, but would have been destructive for me as a teacher. Not only that, but it would have also eaten up a significant amount of already precious class time. As a result of this, much of the proprioception that I wanted to chart was lost.

I also would have liked for the students to have done more of the research for the topic. If they had been the ones to search for information and look up organizations, they would have had more ownership over the whole process. Their literacy skills are on such different levels that it would have been both difficult and time consuming to adequately teach them all how to scan and pull out information from dense texts, how to do web searches, and how to screen out unrelated hits and false or dead-end links. Those skills take years, or at least much practice to develop. What I did do was have them read information and research organizations that I had already identified. In the case of the written text, they had to highlight and respond to the main ideas, write questions that the material raised for them, synthesize the information, and figure out how or if to use it for their documentary. For the web research about activist organizations, they had to respond to a list of questions I created (see appendix G) and tell me if and how they wanted to

incorporate the organization in the documentary. This was not genuine inquiry, though, because they only had access to things that I thought important to share or that I found interesting. There may have been an organization or a piece of information that they would have found exciting to work with, that either completely eluded me or that I did not think was important. In that way, I was a gatekeeper.

Because of the dual emphasis on product and process, there were many times when "teachable moments" were compromised for the sake of moving on with the project. For example, after the graffiti board activity, the students were extremely interested in talking about the comments and ideas that were written on the sheets. They wanted to discuss the issues more, sharing what they had heard and thought about the topics. However, because of the fact that that activity took place on the third day of the sixth week and the topic had to be decided by the fourth day, I had to cut the discussion. Had I done that activity earlier, I could have used what they wrote to collect related articles or discussion prompts, or to organize another excursion. And if we had had more time to complete the project, or if we did not have a screening deadline looming in the near future, I would have been able to entertain the students' desires.

This is not unlike the normal and unfortunate compromises that any public school teacher faces. While I would have been able to do more without the constraints of time, time is always going to be an issue. Everything must come to an end at some point. If the project is drawn out too long, the students lose steam, inertia, and interest. Also, the nature of the project almost demands a public showcase, which takes pre-planning and negotiation with people outside of the project who operate on different timelines and under different constraints.

In my proposal, I identified several limitations. Principal among them is the fact that I am not tracking the participants after they completed the semester. While what I did within those fifteen weeks showed good results, I simply can not tell what long-term impact the project had on the students' engagement with ideas and information, involvement with social change, perceptions of themselves as power brokers, or interactions with others in social-intellectual situations. In other words, what happens when the students leave the community that was created? How much of what was gained is subsequently lost when the students are reintroduced full-time into stifling environments? And, while I definitely saw the students develop critical consciousness over the course of the semester, how much of what took place was in response to my encouragement and prodding, as opposed to their own developing ability to prod themselves, so to speak? It is impossible to tell whether after engaging in this project, the students will continue to be curious, to ask questions, to seek answers based on the questions they ask, to engage in discussion with others, to put themselves in new environments and deconstruct their own environments based on the new, to replicate the process that they've been engaged in for themselves.

In order to be critically conscious a person has to *unlearn* the passive learning posture taught in directive, content-driven learning environments, and become resocialized, positing one's self in an active position of power. A kindergarten student who is raised in a constructivist, student-centered, inquiry-based learning environment through high school most likely will continue to think and learn that way, because that is all she knows. But it probably would take a high school student who was just being introduced to this environment a lot longer than fifteen weeks to adopt this way of

thinking. In my idealism, I neglected to take this into consideration. If I could extend the project beyond fifteen weeks, I would love to do so. It seemed like some of the students, namely Demetrius and Shawn, were just getting to the point where they felt comfortable with each other and with the process of inquiry when the semester ended.

In thinking about how this project fits into the larger professional setting, many challenges appear. Replicating this type of project in a traditional public school setting has obvious practical obstacles including time, human resources, and budget.

Each class required a lot of planning and preparation time. I tried to base each subsequent activity on the previous activity—reflecting on and then trying to solve for gaps in understanding; gauging and then trying to improve the students' morale, energy and interest level; noticing and then trying to figure out ways to pull out the silent voices. And then there was the time required for setting up the equipment, creating graphic organizers and reading material, and researching and making contact with subject matter experts. For each three hours that I spent teaching, I spent an equal amount of time planning. That is simply not an option in most public schools, when teachers often have only one paid prep period to prepare for sometimes three or four totally different classes.

The project also requires a low teacher-student ratio. The quality of discussions and individual feedback time during each class would have been substantially different had there been 36 students in the class, as opposed to eleven (including Steven). Many public schools are struggling with over-enrollment and overcrowding. A low student-teacher ratio requires more space, more teachers, and more money.

Block scheduling is another necessity. Again, because of the overcrowding of schools, many high schools try to squeeze as many class periods into the day as they can,

so that all of their students can have contact time. What this looks like is 45-minute periods, as opposed to the two double-period sessions that I had.

The last requirement of the project that poses an obstacle for replication in a traditional public school setting is the relatively expensive technological equipment needed. I had access to three mini-DV cameras, sound and lighting equipment, and three new Macintosh G4 computers with Final Cut Pro software. The software itself sells at roughly $900.

I also must point out another obstacle, one of institutionalized injustice. What conservative politician wants to have a bunch of critical, intelligent, young people of color running around trying to change the power structures of this country?!

It is these very obstacles that make the educational model so problematic, though. In order to implement a similar project within the traditional setting, the traditional setting would have to be completely overhauled.

Implementing the project outside of the traditional public school setting also poses some problems. Originally I had envisioned this project as an after school program, since the after school environment is more amenable to alternative teaching pedagogy. The nature of most after school programs, however, does not impart the same sense of accountability on the part of the students. They would not be compelled to come to class and stick with the project when the work is not as exciting or when the weather outside is inviting. In order for this type of project to work, it requires a great deal of accountability and dedicated time.

All of this is not to say that what happened in this project cannot be replicated anywhere outside of the setting that I was fortunate enough to have. There are definite

ways that the essential components of the project can be replicated in a more traditional setting. Teaching to develop students' critical consciousness does not necessitate the use of media or the production of a final collective body of work. In fact, the inquiry-based teaching/learning model has been used successfully and documented widely in many science classrooms (Duckworth, Dyasi, Krajcik *et al*), and I have seen the constructivist model used in the social sciences. The absolute essential components of the project that I would say *must* be adhered to in order to experience a noteworthy degree of success are: a sufficient amount of time to engage in meaningful discussions, investigations based around students' interests and experiences, and a shift in teacher's role from didactic instructor/gatekeeper of knowledge to facilitator of students' social construction of knowledge. With these three things I believe that we can at least begin to move more in the direction of truly educating our young people for freedom.

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