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## Introduction

In this paper, we address the approaches we take to media production and media teaching and how these approaches form the core of our research interests. This paper discusses the theoretical, pedagogical, and practical implications of using media production, including video and web sites, as tools for educational inquiry. We will demonstrate the praxis of this idea by relating it to contexts of action research. We will explore how cultural studies perspectives and practices ground our work, and provide us with interdisciplinary tools for our analyses.

The ways we conceptualize teaching through media will be explored in relation to two media projects: a video and a web site. Both productions aim to create pedagogical spaces in which we (as producers and as viewers) explore the utility of concepts for media production and media research such as mode of address, subject positioning, and visual juxtaposition. We discuss how and why these three concepts form central tenets in our approach to educational research. Furthermore, we explicate how and why our educational research is formed in and through our activities, concerns, and theorizing as media producers, and relies on the simultaneous practices and overarching theoretical and political concerns of action research, community activism, and pedagogical analysis. As we argue for the place of media production as educational research, we offer justifications for a theory and practice that draw upon the already achieved research status of action research, community activism, cultural studies, and scholarship on pedagogy.

Because media can exist in any number of forms including video and film production, CD-ROM, DVD web site authoring, photography, and music composition, we call them "media forms" as a group to communicate the multiple delivery systems that media can take, as well as the multiple levels of meaning that they generate in various contexts of reception. While writing exists as the primary form of academic communication in educational research, media production presents increasing opportunities to study and express the complexity of learning in a postmodern era in which montage, bricolage, and non-linear thinking begin to displace positivist, rationalist, and instrumental epistemologies (Ulmer, 1992) .

Traditionally, media like video have been used for documentation and as a data source in educational research. We argue that media production can be used for more than just a data source. Media production can be seen as a methodological approach to working through theoretical questions related to pedagogy and curriculum. These questions relate to developing pedagogies for a growing population of students that are multiply positioned across subject positions of gender, race, nation, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and so on. Part of our project will be to incorporate theoretical tools regarding media reception and pedagogy from cultural studies and apply them to educational research.

### **Media Tools/Educational Tools**

We are advancing media production as a form of educational research, in part, because of the proliferation and ubiquity of not only computers and the Internet in the general public, but also the growing prevalence and ease of use of media production tools (i.e. camcorders, digital cameras, etc) in schools, universities, colleges, and community organizations. While production hardware (i.e. computers, digital cameras, video cameras) have become smaller and less expensive, media production software (i.e. image manipulation, video production, web-site production software) has, at the same time, become easier to use for people without extensive technical backgrounds. In fact, the technical abilities of people are rising quickly as computers become regular fixtures in the work place and schools [\[1\]](#). Through the convergence of media production on the computer, these skills are narrowing to a smaller skill set that provides for more applicability to multiple media. For example,

skills acquired in learning an image editing program are applicable across other programs including video production software. As the tools become more intuitive, the access to production will continue to increase.

Media production tools -- from video editing equipment to web site authoring tools -- are making it easier and less expensive for educational researchers and teachers to use them to conduct research, represent data, and create self-critical and self-reflexive teacher/production practices. The recent introduction of the Apple iMac DV SE is one such example of a relatively affordable production tool. For \$2000, one can purchase an Apple iMac and video camera, and easily create polished video productions using the included editing software, iMovie, -- an easy-to-use program created for people with little or no background in video production. In addition to the increasing ease and lower expense of video production, web site authoring tools are following a similar trend. Software tools such as Microsoft's FrontPage, Macromedia Dreamweaver , and Adobe GoLive are opening up the construction of complex web sites to people who are not professional web designers. Because of these trends in hardware and software, teachers, students, educational researchers, and activists can now edit video or create web sites, making deliberate choices of form and style for the media that they create.

At the same time that more opportunities exist for locally produced video and website production, we realize the importance of taking into account the complex histories, meanings, and uses of technology. As media producers and educators, we see media texts and technologies not just as neutral objects or 'tools'. We see texts and technologies as historically embedded in social relations, and constituted by practices and discourses that position 'users' in relation to 'tools' and 'messages,' with clear implications for what 'users' are supposed to do and be. We recognize how media operate and how they form significant parts of our 'cultural capital' .

## **Theory**

Cultural studies approaches to media forms open up possibilities for the creation of pedagogical

contexts and environments that invite teachers, students, and curriculum designers to explore learning in ways that take into account visual pleasure, intertextuality, the play of the unconscious, reception contexts and other aspects of spectatorship as they relate to education (Todd, 1999). These are all aspects of learning in a postmodern society.

Cultural studies can best be described as an approach to inquiry that focuses on the connection between social relations and meanings and the ways that social divisions are constituted. Cultural studies approaches generally seek to illuminate the subordination of one group over another. In cultural studies, the production of knowledge is always understood as existing in and inseparable from the complex nexus of relations of power. According to this perspective, culture is framed as the subordination of non-dominant groups by the interests of dominant groups. In addition, culture can be seen as the resistance to this subordination. Culture in this context is therefore revealed as a site of social struggle. This struggle is exposed by cultural studies in terms of how class, race, gender, and other inequalities are naturalized and represented in forms (often through media) which break the connection between these various social and cultural identities and political and economic inequality.

In the past 25 years, cultural studies has precipitated radical changes in understandings of how meaning and knowledge are constructed and contested. These changes have disrupted the assumptions and practices of entire academic fields, such as history, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, law, medicine, communication and education. What some have called the "crisis in representation" is not simply a crisis in how we think about meaning. It is also a political crisis in which marginalized groups have refused to be "represented" in the sense of "spoken for" or "defined" or assigned meanings by anyone other than themselves.

Cultural studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary approach to studying cultural productions and social and political practices. While there is much debate about the definition and place of cultural studies in the academy, there is widespread agreement among its practitioners of the importance of calling into question binary logics that structure social organizing, cultural productions, and the ways people make sense of their everyday lives. Cultural studies approaches to representation and meaning

assume multiplicity and difference (within and between subjects), and assume division and disagreement with regard to interpretation.

The focus on multiplicity, non-linearity, and non-binary conceptions in cultural studies demands reassessment of taken-for-granted assumptions about teachers and students, producers, texts and contexts. We investigate with students what is at stake, what is suppressed, and what remains unthought in binary relations such as: high culture/low or (mass) culture; public/private; theory/practice; mind/body; culture/nature; self/other; citizen/alien; and health/disease. The left component in these binary oppositions almost always have privileged status in Western culture, and have been associated with the techniques of power that define the other. We explore through media production the ways in which these binary terms interrelate and mutually constitute one another.

Using media production as educational research shifts the kinds of theoretical questions that educational researchers can ask while allowing new forms of analysis and providing multiple forms of data representation. Traditionally, media audience research has referred to the attempts on the part of educators to teach the skills needed to "decode" "encoded" messages (Halloran, 1970). This oversimplification of the audience\author\text relationship fails to take into account social and cultural differences and identities, contexts of viewing, and historical moments. Media studies and cultural studies theorists have come to understand media spectatorship to mean an ability to make a wide variety of meanings from mediated messages created by the complex intertextuality of film, television, radio, and the Internet (Ang, 1991; Ang, 1996; D'Acci, 1994; Ellsworth, 1997, Mayne, 1993). These researchers locate a growing population of individuals able to and preferring to learn and communicate through media (Ito, 1998).

With these new concepts of educational technology audiences, how can we find a praxis that links this theory to the practice of teaching and educational scholarship? One way is through action research.

## **Media Production as Action Research**

Media production has the potential to make a strong impact on educational research through the principles and practices of action research. By action research, we mean media that emerges out of the local needs, issues, resources and understandings of people at particular historical moments and in specific social contexts. We want to stress that when we talk about media production we don't mean simply turning on the camera and recording an educational, research, or community event. We are suggesting a process in which the teacher, student, researcher (i.e. all stakeholders) are actively involved in the production process. Increasingly, teachers are using cameras as a research tool to examine their own practice. Meaning making in this sense becomes a deliberate process of carefully considered representations of image/text/sound relationship.

For us, the concept of representation is integral to the tasks of analyzing and producing media through action research. Representation foregrounds texts as always constructed, assembled, manipulated, edited -- never just a "window on the world", never just the simple "reflection" of reality. Media producers, users and educators participate in the social construction of meaning, in selecting and structuring meanings into "knowledge," and in representing knowledge through language, images, stories, and ways of interacting. Whether consciously or unconsciously, media producers, users and educators are always enacting assumptions and beliefs about representation -- how we "know" what something "means"; how we determine the "correct" meanings of people, things and events; the relation of images, stories and language to what is "real", and the importance of meanings and knowledge to social control and social change.

Media production as Action Research can be regarded as one aspect of an ongoing and unpredictable process of attempts by individuals, community groups, workers and others to interpret their social positions and to represent that sense visually and verbally for celebration, confirmation, alteration or rejection. For educators, this offers a whole set of opportunities for interesting and challenging work that draws on our skills in production and technical support, in criticism and in theoretical research to work with students and others in producing and using media that are situated in the particulars of time and place. It is important to note that we do not want to limit our discussion of

media production as action research to only those contexts in which media production is used for researching learning in the schools. Much important teaching and learning occurs in community contexts where other institutions besides schools are responsible for the creation of pedagogical possibilities.

One of the ways in which we deploy media production as action research is through the production courses we teach to educators. Instead of a pedagogy based on what students do not know, we try to take up the invitation in cultural studies to focus on what students do know, what they make use of in their everyday lives. We work with teachers and others to create media productions that they can and will use in their teaching. The multiple identities, subjugated knowledges, strategic understandings that we bring with us into class form the basis for a pedagogy that challenges top-down approaches to learning and that uncovers what has been repressed through our subjection to various regimes of truth. For us, this pedagogy implies a responsibility on the part of teachers and students for generating tentative, partial and context-specific understandings of issues and events and to recover the connections between the personal, the educational, the political, and the theoretical.

Our skills in production and technical support, in criticism, and in theoretical research allow us to assist students in the production and use of media that are situated in the particulars of time and place -- Action Research Media that emerge out of the local needs, issues, resources, and understandings of people at particular historical moments and in specific social contexts.

When it comes to making choices regarding media production, we encourage students to think about how and why a particular text might be used, and whose interests might be served or harmed by its exhibition. We work with students to recognize how media operate institutionally, how they form significant parts of our cultural capital, and how we negotiate meanings with media texts in contexts that are never neutral.

We encourage our students to create media projects that are collaborative in nature. We feel strongly that group work is one way we can attempt to counter the rampant individualism in our

culture and in our educational institutions. Media are rarely, if ever, produced by one person. It is a common complaint of established media producers that new employees have no practice in group work and are inexperienced collaborators.

Many students come to class with bad histories of group work. We let students know that we take group work seriously. We ask students to take on the practice of working collectively as one way to undermine individualism and the unitary, rational subject of Western philosophy and social organizing. By working collectively, students challenge entrenched notions of power, competition, and meritocracy that circulate around the very media with which we are engaged, and within the institution in which we work.

Collaborative work also provides a necessary catalyst to enable us to address intersecting issues of power, identity, and technology. The attempt to introduce collaborative work into a university classroom occurs within institutional contexts of individualism and competition where classrooms have not often been constructed with an interest in providing personable and personal spaces that encourage students to develop a sense of responsibility toward one another. Collaborative media making necessitates thinking about what it means to work with others. It can also open spaces for teachers and students (together and separately) to re-think themselves within the classroom and the institution.

Denaturalizing technology and denaturalizing ourselves means focusing on the group interaction through connection to the task. Reading critiques of educational media conventions can show us how power is invested in normative media practices. However, until we live the power of constructing differently, we may be missing our own embodiment of those (and other) norms. Making something else is one manifestation of how we always are uncovering, remembering, repressing - processes through which we can begin to understand not only ourselves differently, but also the processes of identity formation, power-in-use, and the tasks on which we are collaborating.

We believe that collective work is an important and necessary catalyst for understanding how

the Western, Cartesian 'I' of social organizing, is constructed in relation and acts always in relation. We do not mean to suggest that collaborative work is a panacea or any kind of a resolution for a monological, exclusionary curriculum. We do believe that working collaboratively helps us focus on difference rather than blur difference, and this is why it is another important commitment of ours. It is also an important political statement. If knowledge and identity are socially constructed, they will be re/constructed socially.

## **Media Production as Pedagogical Research**

As media production instructors, we understand that process and product are inseparable. By focusing on the process of media production, we help transition media forms from simple, instrumental, educational add-ons – side notes to the "real" curriculum -- and instead argue for their place as new and fruitful sites in which to examine issues of production, performance, representation, context and response in educational research and pedagogy. In our work as teachers, researchers, and media producers, we have used media production as a way of exploring teaching through difference and across discourses. We'd like briefly to show two examples of what we have been addressing – a video and web site that we created with two other producers, Elizabeth Ellsworth and Clark Thompson. The video is entitled, “Degrees of Difference: Cultural Matters on Campus” and the web site is called “CancerShock”.

### **Degrees of Difference: Culture Matters on Campus**

"Degrees of Difference: Culture Matters on Campus" is a video that addresses the richness of the social and cultural difference brought to university and college campuses by members of university and college communities. The video features various creative social and cultural responses that students, faculty, and staff make at the "meeting places" between what they bring to and what they find at their universities or colleges. At those meeting places, we can see how social and cultural difference is always in action and in the making. It is always in process and never complete.

"Degrees of Difference" emphasizes the strategies and ideas that students, faculty, staff and administrators have for getting their needs met, for making a home on campus and for feeling good about themselves and their work, their cultures, and their bodies. The university is portrayed as a site and an occasion for the production and negotiation of social and cultural difference, rather than as something that exists outside of or prior to these dynamics.

The video has been used extensively throughout the UW-Madison campus and by over 150 other colleges and universities to talk about social and cultural difference in relation to student experiences. We borrowed heavily from feminist theorists who argue that ideas like gender (Butler, 1993) and race (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993) are not easily definable categories and in fact are fluid. In the video, we consistently try to avoid foreclosing on how the viewer constructs difference by showing representations of people who do not fit into traditional categories of race, class, gender, ability, size. We use the film theory concept of mode of address (Ellsworth, 1997) to both think about how we constructed our audience and represented our participants.

For example one person interviewed in the video is a Brazilian man, who is frequently read as Anglo-European. The opening sequences show him playing U.S. blues on his harmonica. During his interview, he talks about how strange it is to fill in the category, "Latino" on his government and university forms. In Brazil, ideas of race signify in entirely different ways than in the midwestern United States.

At one moment in the video, the audience is presented with a series of problems that people who occupy privileged positions vis-a-vis race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, age, and size don't need to confront as a part of daily survival. Spoken from a series of unconscious positions of power, the problems utilize Peggy Macintosh's (1988) "knapsack of privilege" and are set against traditional views of campus -- students walking on lakeshore paths, studying on the grass, talking. This segment provides opportunities for the viewer to connect their individual viewing experience (viewing as spectator) to their own experience (viewer as participant). Some of the statements included in this section include:

1. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
2. I can be sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only one speaking English.
3. I can be fairly sure that my body size or disability will not count against me in terms of academic advancement or workplace promotion.
4. Because of my sexual orientation, my partner is seen as an asset to my life, deserving of health benefits and family privileges.
5. I can speak in my native tongue without fear that people think I'm talking about them.

The video allowed us -- as educational researchers and media producers -- to draw upon our experiences as teachers and as cultural theorists to explore pedagogical interventions into the complex, contested nature of the intersections of difference. To write or teach about these intersections would have created a completely different set of representations about our project. Without the power of sound/image relationships, mise-en-scene, multiple aural and visual channels, we would have had a much more difficult time attempting to represent the complexity, multiplicity, and simultaneity of voices that were included on the video.

### **CancerShock.com**

CancerShock.com is a web-site (<http://www.cancershock.com>) created to support cancer patients and healthcare professionals in creating non-linear, flexible, discursive spaces for cancer treatment. It uses animation, polls, interactive writing tools, bulletin boards, eCards, and various other textual queues to provide a context for visitors to reflect on and at times rethink their identities as cancer patients, patient supporters and healthcare workers. The site uses these queues to encourage visitors to contribute their own narratives as a way to think through their relationships with themselves, their loved ones, their patients, and cancer. Theoretically, the web site tries to engage with issues of multiple subjectivities and agency addressed in poststructural theories.

CancerShock was created to act as a model and workshop to help people fighting cancer reframe their healthcare experiences in ways that resist the binary logics that surround people living with cancer and their

supporters. The website acts on behalf of cancer patients and supporters to reframe notions of health, health care, and disease in ways that support the daily lives and struggles of cancer patients and supporters to make new meanings of the disease. Meanings that themselves change practices, politics, and outcomes.

As a research tool, CancerShock presented an instrument in which to create a culturally informed approach to the design of educational new media. It provides us with a way to make concrete a new media pedagogy that takes advantage of the ability of new media to create layers of intertextual meaning and interaction. The design of CancerShock represents an alternative to educational media design influenced by educational psychology, and shows an alternative approach that is guided by theoretical frameworks and approaches from within cultural studies, media studies, post-structuralist theories, and feminisms.

The design of CancerShock focuses on how educators can create invitations into existing and new subject positions. As we have already stated, CancerShock was created to act as a model and workshop to help people fighting cancer reframe their healthcare experiences in ways that resist the binaries that are presented to people living with cancer and those who support them. These binaries include sick/healthy, patient/doctor, feeling good/feeling bad – binaries that serve to create static notions of disease and people with disease. Binaries that allow and disallow a multitude of ways of experiencing oneself with cancer.

## **Conclusions**

Media production allows us as researchers to think differently about our audience. There are, of course, limitations to the notion that media production can be used as a communication medium for academic discourse. Writing, even using a computer, is a generally ubiquitous skill that is frequently learned early in life. Media production as educational research does not open opportunities for all people. Many researchers are not interested in the kinds of questions that can be answered via the process of media production. Furthermore, media production requires skills that must be gained and updated in order to be effective. This can produce barriers for those who do not think of themselves as technically inclined. However, it does not exclude them outright. From the increasingly intuitive nature of computers to working with more technically inclined collaborators, the opportunities to

create media are, as we have already shown, increasing at a rapid rate. This includes opportunities for people in disenfranchised communities, in social and political groups, and in various workplace organizations who are accessing the means of production through cable television and community based production, as well as through higher end projects with larger budgets and greater resources.

In thinking about media production as research, it is necessary to examine the processes of production that allow for continual reflection and reassessment regarding the representations we construct. The relationship between producer, subject and audience is one that requires serious attention. Who are we making programs for? Who is the intended audience? What assumptions are we making about the understandings and experiences that our intended audience brings to a viewing? What are our own issues and investments as producers?

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[1] According to a recent Kaiser/Kennedy/NPR pole 68% of work force uses computers at works.