

In press (2015), B. Yoon and R. Sharif (Eds.), *Critical Literacy Practice: Applications of Critical Theory in Diverse Settings*. Springer.

Afterschool MediaClub: Critical Literacy in a High Diversity, High Poverty Urban Setting

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It's November of 2012, and it's been another warm day in late Spring. It's an hour and a half past the end of the school day, yet a dozen or so students are hanging out in the computer lab under the supervision of a small group of research personnel, working on the video games they are creating. Two of the adults and three students are outside, engaged in an interview about their experience of MediaClub this term. Drawing on a wry sense of humour when interview questions verge on being a tad too serious, the students try to convince the interviewers that the major attraction of MediaClub is the spread of sandwiches and fresh fruit offered up as afternoon tea. After some shared laughter and a bit of friendly banter, one lad goes on to say, "Lately we've been working on Scratch, making our own games and using different stuff, motion like and sensing and making the sprite move and all that...." He then beckons to his buddy who continues: "Um, so far we've been using Scratch, the computer, where we make our own video game, or, you can basically create whatever you want on it... Now we're practising on a game called Pong. It's an old school game... We're learning, we're watching [tutorials] on video, online, and it was pretty fun."

In all the interviews conducted that afternoon, students spoke similarly; they too were having “fun” and learning “to use different stuff” at MediaClub. In the chapter that follows, we look at the critical outcomes of MediaClub: What might a voluntary afterschool media production activity in a school affected by multiple forms of disadvantage make available in the way of critical literacy practices?

Background of the Study

School Context

The students introduced in the opening vignette all attended a high diversity, high poverty elementary school located in a satellite city beyond the outer suburbs of an Australian metropolitan area. At the time, the school enrolled 5- to 12-year-olds across eight grade levels, that included a Preparatory year and Years One through Seven inclusive. At least 23 cultures were represented in the student population. Many of the students were learning the Standard Australian English of the newly introduced national curriculum as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), although only six percent met stringent state eligibility requirements for specialist EAL/D support. About 15 percent of the school cohort was Indigenous, identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; 10 percent were migrants or refugees from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and South America; and a substantial number were Pasifika (Pacific Islander) and/or Maori. Many students live in homes affected by poverty: the local area was ranked in the lowest quartile of communities on national indicators of socio-economic status (Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011).

The school was participating in a major curriculum renewal project called the URLearning Project (hereafter, the URL project) which ran from 2010 to 2014. We were particularly interested in evidence of what is commonly referred to as the ‘fourth grade slump.’ Despite a relatively large number of students receiving special education services, over 80 percent of the cohort had been meeting the reading benchmark on State testing at Year Three (students aged approximately eight years) prior to the study. However, less than 60 percent were meeting the reading benchmarks in Years Five and Seven (students aged approximately 10 years and 12 years respectively) (Luke et al., 2011).

By way of redress of the fourth grade slump, the school was implementing a program of explicit instruction in reciprocal teaching and comprehension strategies (Luke et al., 2011). This was a program which worked with students’ background knowledge and recognised the cultural implication of such. Given the respect for student knowledge, it was the type of program that takes literacy education beyond the alienating ‘banking model’ described by Paulo Freire (Luke, 2014). Nonetheless, there was more to be done: behaviour management remained a challenge as teachers grappled with problems of student time-on-task and engagement. In this context, URL researchers worked with teachers to redesign literacy education practices, increasing intellectual demand, forging stronger connections to the students’ worlds, and promoting sustained conversation (Luke et al., 2011; Woods, Dooley, Luke, & Exley, 2014). Criticality was integral to the redesign work.

The URL project addressed the redesign of a wide range of print and digital literacies both within the formal classroom program and beyond. It was design-based research which sought not to document existing practice, but to create new practice in collaboration with participants (Mills & Levido, 2011). In doing so, it extended existing critical work in the case study school. Like high diversity, high poverty schools in the United States, the school was subject to back-to-basics pressures. Basics were certainly a focus of some URL work, but so too was critical literacy. By way of example, the Preparatory Year teachers (who taught students aged approximately five years) seized upon the opportunities for intellectually demanding and critical work afforded by the state-wide rollout of a national curriculum for the subject English (Exley & Dooley, 2015). In doing so, they drew on a cluster of text analytic traditions of critical literacy established in Australian schools for over twenty years: explicit instruction in genres of power; resistant reading inspired by post-structural theory; and critical language awareness grounded in the systemic functional linguistics of M.A.K. Halliday (Exley, Woods, & Dooley, 2014).

MediaClub complemented the in-classroom components of the URL project. It was an afterschool program for Year Four through Seven students. The Club ran for 14 school terms before it was handed over to the school at the end of the project. Here we look at some of the critical outcomes of MediaClub.

The MediaClub Project

At the beginning of each of the four terms of the school year, an invitation to participate in an eight-week MediaClub module was extended to all the Year Four through Year Seven students in the case study school. The first 16-20 applicants were accepted. Applicants were neither screened nor charged fees nor required to supply any equipment; the only stipulation was a commitment to attendance: “If your child misses 2 sessions their place in MediaClub will be given to another student” (Invitation flyer, Term 4, 2012).

The aim of MediaClub was to skill students up as digital media production experts with the disposition and capacity to mentor others in the literate practices of their classrooms, homes and communities. This aim is a critical one because it entails social action to change the literate resources available to children and adults in a community where digital resources could not be assumed. Our interest in building capacity for family and community practices stemmed from the conviction that access to the digital literacies of everyday life in the second decade of the twenty-first century is as important an issue of social justice as access to the digital literacies of schooling (Woods, Levido, Dezuanni, & Dooley, 2014).

Over the 14 school terms in which the URL project ran MediaClub, students were provided with opportunities to learn production skills in a wide range of digital media:

- film-making;
- Lego robotics;
- GarageBand (3 times);
- stop motion animation;
- media remix (photography, film-making and webpage-building);
- comics;
- digital publishing (ebooks, posters, photography, film-making);
- podcasting and radio production;
- video games (the focal module in this chapter);
- macro photography; and
- iPad-based story-telling.

Most MediaClub sessions followed the same routine: (1) afternoon tea (20 minutes); (2) group time (25 minutes) – an introduction to the afternoon’s tasks, with explicit teaching of new language, concepts and skills; (3) independent work time (1 hour) – work on media products under the supervision of the adults; and (4) group sharing time (15 minutes) – display of the day’s work and feedback. The term culminated in a Showcase session to which the students’ families and school personnel were invited. MediaClub modules were sometimes led by the URL media teacher or a URL researcher – all of whom were involved in other components of the URL project. Sometimes, however, the lead teacher was an artist or musician employed for a given module (see Dooley in press a, b).

MediaClub was rich in critical potential. For at least a decade, exponents of critical literacy have been working with digital media in primary classrooms (e.g., Evans, 2004; Vasquez, 2014). Indeed, the in-classroom components of the URL project added to a growing literature on critical digital literacies. However, MediaClub was not a classroom learning space. It might have involved some of the same rooms, equipment and personnel, but it differed in several ways: MediaClub was a voluntary, cross-grade afterschool activity that was not tied directly to the formal school program. This complex play of similarity and difference seemed to bear on the forms of criticality evident at MediaClub. We now introduce a typology of critical approaches for describing those forms.

Theoretical Framework

Critical literacy is a project to realise the promise of democracy and deepen social justice. In an overview of the field, Allan Luke (2014) observed that critical literacy entails analysis, critique and transformation of communication practices within the school and beyond. It requires explicit normative decisions about whose truths count as curricular

knowledge and which communicative modes, intellectual tools and textual designs are legitimate in pedagogy. Two families of approaches are influential in schools internationally: the critical pedagogic and the text analytic. Both have roots in Paulo Freire's insights into the political work and the material and social consequences of literacy education.

Critical pedagogic approaches draw overtly on Freirean (1970) pedagogic moves. They make extensive use of dialogue to name and rename the power relations, which shape social and cultural issues salient in students' lives. In some cases, the focus is on relations of power in the classroom and the school. In early work in Canada, for instance, Vivian Vasquez (2004, 2014) enabled students to take action on issues that included the lack of vegetarian options in school settings, the exclusion of young children from certain school activities, the manipulation of children as consumers, and the monocultural contents of the school library. In American contexts voice has been an emphasis of critical pedagogic approaches; teachers have worked to facilitate student voice on the issues that matter in their lives (Luke, 2014).

In contrast, text analytic approaches to critical literacy focus on the deconstruction and transformation of texts, although they may be accompanied by social action. These approaches have been institutionalised in Australian schooling for twenty years, especially for students of linguistically and culturally marginalised groups (Luke, 2014; Luke & Dooley, 2011). One ubiquitous text analytic approach seeks to redistribute access to dominant language and discourse; it entails explicit instruction in the purposes, textual structures and language features of texts recognised – not without controversy – as being the genres of power. We observed this approach in the Preparatory classrooms when the teachers instructed students in fairy tales as a form of narrative (Exley et al., 2014). Critical language awareness is another established text analytic approach in Australian schools. It entails teaching students how grammatical choices represent and marginalise disparate groups in particular ways. In the Preparatory classes, for instance, this entailed attention to the representational work of the noun group in a postmodern fairy tale book (Exley & Dooley, 2015; Exley et al., 2014). Yet, another text analytic approach utilises the deconstructive moves of post-structuralist feminism. This approach was evident in the resistant reading practices used in the Preparatory classroom (Exley et al., 2014).

In recent years, text analytic approaches have moved beyond deconstruction to transformative text production and social action (Janks & Comber, 2006). Some URL researchers were involved in this type of critical literacy work through visual ethnography (Mills, Comber, & Kelly, 2013). Working with colleagues from another research team active in the case study school, they facilitated a film-making unit on local places that integrated curricular outcomes for English, Geography, Health and Physical Education, Information and Communication Technologies, and the cross-curricular theme of the Australian Curriculum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. The students not only produced representations of their lived worlds, but also worked for transformation of those worlds. To this end, the students included a response to this phrase in their films: "If I was a community leader I would change..." (Mills et al., 2013, p. 24). The films were presented at a local conference where they could inform community thinking. The researchers concluded that the students seemed to have gone some way towards acquiring what Freire (see Freire & Macedo, 1987) identified as 'critical consciousness.'

No one approach to critical literacy is 'right' in and of itself: "critical literacy is utterly contingent" (Luke, 2014, p. 29). As a consequence, the design of any given instance of critical literacy practice should turn on a reading of the relations of power in everyday worlds

and the struggles of students and their teachers in those worlds. Moreover, evaluation of critical literacy should attend to the transformative effects of the practice (Luke, 2014; Luke & Dooley, 2011). Yet, at this time, this work of ‘utter contingency’ is often carried out in contexts where neo-liberal educational thinking is exerting a press for standardisation of literacy curricula. This was the situation in the case study school.

During the period of the URL project, external control of high diversity, high poverty schools, like the case study school, was ramped up by both Federal and State educational agencies (Exley et al., 2014). The national regimen of literacy testing instituted in 2008, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (hereafter NAPLAN) and subsequent online publication of the results brought pressure for increased instruction in the print basics. Further, Australia’s inaugural national curriculum was rolled out in Queensland from 2012 to the accompaniment of a back-to-basics rhetoric. Making a local interpretation of the national curriculum, the State education department introduced a set of centrally-produced units of work known as *Curriculum into the Classroom* (or *C2C*). The pressure for fidelity to the units was strongest in schools that were not amongst the highest performers on NAPLAN. This represented a departure from established practice in a context where school and teacher control of curriculum had historically been strong.

Although the details may differ, the conditions at the case study school at the time of the URL project are a point of commonality with other high diversity, high poverty settings internationally where highly prescriptive, if not scripted, pedagogies have been imposed in recent years. We look now at what we can learn from efforts to enact critical literacy in such settings.

Literature Review

Cynthia Lewis (2014) has identified standardisation as a recurring theme of recent accounts of critical literacy in schools in several countries. Globalisation, she observes, is a force for both diversification and homogenisation. In the case of literacy education, homogenisation is occurring as literacy is seen as a means to a more competitive national workforce and also, as a commodity that can be sold to schools. On the one hand, centralised standards may define literacy in ways that are antithetical to criticality (Moore, Zancanella, & Ávila, 2014), as can testing regimens and prescriptive materials (Exley et al., 2014). These factors are especially consequential for practice in high diversity, high poverty schools (Meyer & Whitmore, 2012); in our context, it is such schools that are under the most pressure to narrow curricula to prescriptive materials. On the other hand, institutionalisation of critical literacy is not necessarily the boon it might be: writing critical literacy into textbooks can turn it into a technical apparatus of scripted literacy education, thereby failing to satisfy its own remit of democracy and social justice (Zacher Pandya, 2014).

Afterschool media production activities have been identified as one way of *reclaiming* literacy education for students, teachers and communities (Jurich & Meyer, 2012). This is a position rooted in a vision of a democratic nation strengthened by “an articulate, curious, inquiring, active, and proactive citizenship” (Meyer & Whitmore, 2012, p. 1). From this perspective, critical literacy is seen as a way of reappropriating not only reading, but also learning, teaching, curriculum, language and sociocultural contexts; it is a way of recovering the joy that has been lost in teaching contexts and of re-authorising the voices of teachers and students as authorities on their schooled and everyday worlds. By this account, digital critical literacies enable analysis of, and social action in the sociocultural contexts of children’s lives

(Vasquez & Felderman, 2012); an afterschool media production club is one more forum for such (Jurich & Meyer, 2012). It is notable, however, that no account is made of the particularity of the afterschool media production club as an *afterschool* space.

Differences between in- and out-of-school literacy learning spaces were a focus of a major study from the United States (Ito et al., 2010). That research sought to test claims about the ramifications of two apparent ‘divides:’ the generational divide between the digital media use of adults and youth; and the digital divide between the literacy practices of school and the world beyond. In particular, it was interested in claims that these divides are leading to challenges to adult authority in the education and socialisation of children. Accordingly, the study looked at how youth are taking up new media and implications of such for negotiating literacy, learning and authoritative knowledge with adults. One of the findings was that youth were participating in digital media contexts in three ways: hanging out, messing around and geeking out. The challenge, it was concluded, is “to build roles for productive adult participation that respect youth expertise, autonomy and initiative” (Ito et al., 2010, p. 340). Another finding was that some youth became involved in immigrant rights activities or online activist groups while others acted as media experts for schools and community organisations. The conclusion was that adults should work with youth-driven social energies rather than impose forms of civic participation. Although URL participants were younger than those in the study, these findings were a subject for ongoing reflection and discussion on the part of some of the URL researchers as we negotiated our places – as adults – at MediaClub and considered the potential for critical outcomes.

Methods

Most of the data presented in this chapter were produced in Term 4 of 2012. Fifteen participants were on the MediaClub roll that term, some of whom were ‘regulars,’ who had completed five or more terms of MediaClub. As usual, the MediaClub enrolment was a diverse one: participants included Aboriginal, Thai, Sri Lankan, Pacifica and Anglo students. Video games were the focus for the term:

Students can learn about designing video game avatars and how to create short video games using the program ‘Scratch.’ Students will also have the opportunity to create a short film about their own gaming experiences (Invitation flyer, Term 4, 2012).

Scratch is a free Web2.0 shareware program made available on line since 2003 by the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the MIT Media Lab for users in the age 8 to age 16 group for the purposes of creating stories, games and animations. At the time of the writing of this chapter, the website described *Scratch* as a “creative learning community with 7,463,693 projects shared” (Scratch, n.d.). The digital interface provides a set of block ‘scripts’ that can be clicked, dragged and snapped into a working stack and modified as needed. Scripts include commands for moving, sound, talking (with word clouds), and adding background and/or sprites (objects) either from the library or the users’ own gallery. *Scratch* provides a user-friendly introduction to programming code (language) as well as a large stock of projects where the already invented programming code (language) can be seen with a single click.

The video games module was led by URL personnel and one of us (Karen) spent the term as a participant observer – the eighth consecutive term in which she had played this role. Here we draw on four data sources:

- 1) the invitation flyer for the module;

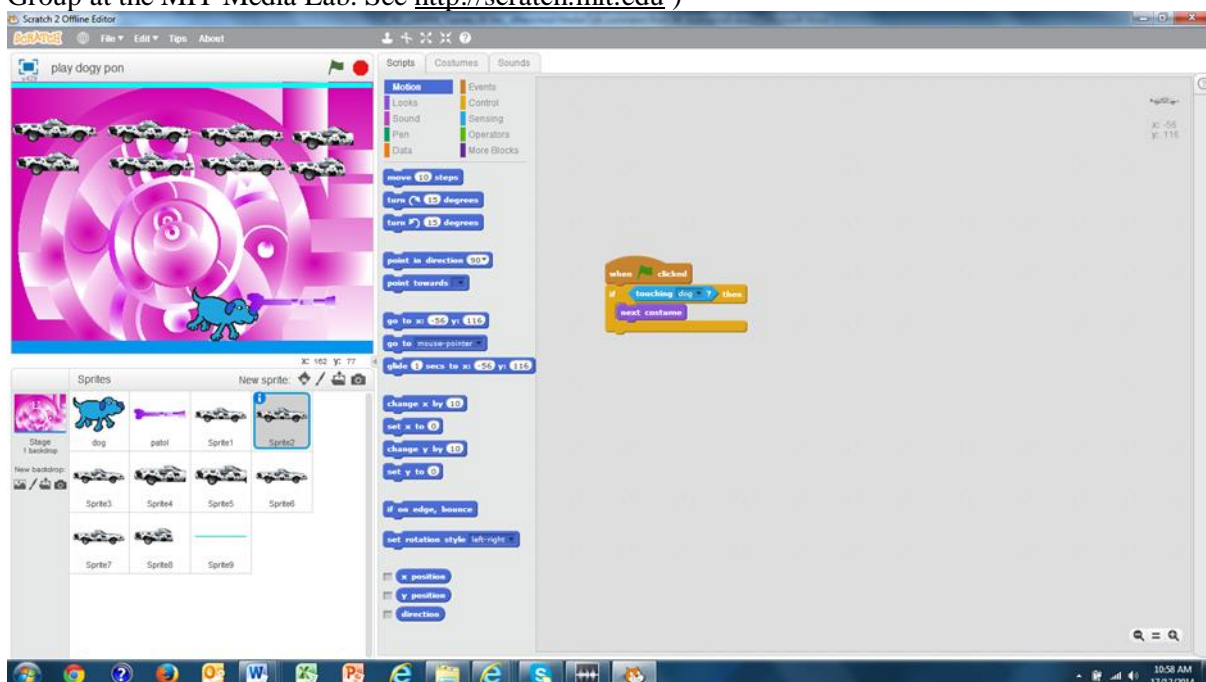
- 2) four five to six minute audio-recorded group interviews conducted with the students in Week 3 of the term;
- 3) field notes produced immediately after each interview; and
- 4) student work samples collected at the end of term.

Brief student interviews were conducted at least once a term during the independent work time of the MediaClub session. Questions probed students' reasons for attending MediaClub that term, their learning from the module, and their perceptions of MediaClub as a space of teaching and learning. They provided insights into the students' experience of MediaClub as a deliberately designed pedagogic space. In the video games term, the interviews were conducted with small groups rather than individuals. Karen was present, but did not lead the interviews. She was silent throughout, although she can be heard laughing along in the jocular banter like that captured in our opening vignette. After each interview, Karen had a discussion with the lead interviewer and then jotted down notes on key themes. The notes reflect some surprise at unanticipated moments of criticality. It is in that surprise that this chapter had its genesis, although as we show, the critical outcomes of MediaClub were not limited to such.

In preparing the chapter, we have used Karen's notes to locate the interviews in the large URL data set but have worked from the audio-recordings, in addition to the invitation flyer and the student work samples. We have listened to the four audio-recordings repeatedly, making notes on what the students said and transcribing their comments, including the excerpts of data presented in the chapter. In analysing the criticality evident in that data, we have used the distinction between text analytic and critical pedagogic approaches introduced earlier (Luke, 2014; Luke & Dooley, 2011).

The work sample in Figure 1 serves an illustrative purpose. It has been included to give some sense of the media products the students were talking about in the interviews we analyse here. No selection criteria were applied; any other sample would have done.

Figure One: "Play dogy pon" video game. (Scratch is developed by the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the MIT Media Lab. See <http://scratch.mit.edu>)



The sample video game screen grab shown in Figure One illustrates a virtual game of “Throw the Bone for the Doggy.” Set against a psychedelic purple background and synthetic audio, the game player clicks and drags Doggy’s bone to a new location. Doggy automatically searches for and finds the bone. The following commands are listed in the stack of Scratch Scripts:

- motion commands include ‘if’ commands, for example ‘if on edge, bounce’
- look commands include Doggy saying ‘Where’s my bone?’
- sound commands include a 02:88 second continuous looped up-tempo drum beat called ‘DripDrop’ when Doggy is looking for the bone and a 02:62 screech sound with raised volume and extended faded echo when Doggy locates the bone. The game is programmed so Doggy always finds the bone.

Findings

During the 14 terms MediaClub was in operation as part of the URL project, it developed into a comfortable and productive teaching and learning space. Early on, there was some negotiation between the student and the adults about the ways that teaching and learning would occur in that space. In particular, students resisted adult efforts to push for high quality media products. The students were content with lower production values; for many of them, MediaClub was a space for hanging out while engaged in digital media learning and production (Woods et al., 2014). As the adults and the students came to know each other and adjusted their expectations accordingly, behaviour management challenges more-or-less faded away. MediaClub became a relaxed space where learning occurred in a context of good relationships amongst and between students and adults.

To elaborate, the students were attentive during group times and engaged during independent work time. The field notes Karen produced during the two years she spent as a participant observer at MediaClub are studded with comments about high levels of attention and engagement on the part of the students. After many years as a teacher and hundreds of hours of classroom observation as a researcher, Karen found the students’ absorption in their learning notable. By the students’ interview accounts, this quality of MediaClub participation seems to have stemmed from the desirable learning that was offered. The following data are indicative of comments made in the interviews conducted during the focal term. In response to a question about what was different between MediaClub and the classroom, the students drew attention to the opportunity to “go on the iPads and computers” and to learn digital media literacies.

- | | |
|------|---|
| St 1 | We get taught different stuff [in the classroom]. |
| St 2 | More boring and stuff. |
| St 3 | English! |
| St 1 | You write down everything but at |
| St 2 | You can type and do it |
| St 1 | MediaClub you get to actually go on it and do different experiences and that. |

From this data, it can be seen that for the students, there was a sharp boundary between what they understood as “English” in the classroom and the literacies of MediaClub. Building on each other’s contributions to the interview talk, the students made a distinction between English with all its ‘writing and typing,’ and MediaClub where you could “go on”

the computer and engage in “different experiences.” In other interviews that afternoon, other students spoke similarly, drawing a distinction between MediaClub and the use of the computers for researching “about animals and all that kind of stuff” in the classroom. It should be noted that some of these students spoke positively of in-class computer activities: “you use different stuff [in class] to make a great thing like in Powerpoint, word art and all that.” Others were less positive: “that’s kind of boring because you just have to copy [on the computer] what you wrote [by hand].” In either case, all the students seemed to enjoy the multimodal digital literacy activities of MediaClub. The word “fun” was invoked repeatedly to characterise MediaClub activity, sometimes emphatically:

- St 1 It’s twice as fun.
St 2 No, 6 000 times fun.

“6 000 times fun” notwithstanding, the students were serious about their learning and responsive to adult guidance. The following data are indicative. They were elicited by a question about what was different between media use at home and MediaClub.

- St 1 Having fun, cos usually when I’m on the computer I get bored easily.
R: Ok, so what’s the difference, what makes it more exciting here?
St 1 You actually get taught stuff, like at home, you just go type on the internet, and we just go on YouTube and stuff.
St 2 When I’m usually home on computers I play what other people have already made where here in MediaClub I can actually [unclear] download *Scratch* and re-make the game so I’ve got it at home to play on.

From this data, it is apparent that the students valued getting “taught stuff” at MediaClub. Moreover, they valued the opportunity to produce rather than to simply consume media. Variations of these views appear throughout the data set. The students spoke positively also of the MediaClub teachers as a group – “great teachers” – and as individuals: “Sarah rules... I wish we could stay forever... MediaClub is awesome! (all personal names in this chapter are names are pseudonyms)” While the students clearly valued learning from adults at MediaClub, they also developed a strong peer learning ethos. During the independent hour, students worked variously on individual and small group projects. In both cases, students tended to turn to each other for ideas and assistance. In response to questions about whether they liked working individually or together at MediaClub the students indicated that they enjoyed collaborating even if they were producing individual projects.

- St 1 Me, George and Stephen, we’re all, we’re not like in a group but we’re just helping each other and giving each other ideas of what to do.

The interviewer went on to probe this comment, asking whether the collaborative ethos they enjoyed so much at MediaClub also occurred in the classroom. The students indicated that it did not.

- St 1 And you’re not just sitting in a classroom where there’s lots of kids and it’s just like this
St 2 And you have to be silent
St 3 But in this you can
St 2 You give your opinion here
St 1 Yeah, you can get your own opinion and you can turn your music up and sit there and chill for a while

In this interview, the students drew a contrast between the interactional norms of the classroom and MediaClub. For these students, MediaClub was a good learning environment because of the chance to “give your opinion” and to control the pace of work (“you can... chill for a while”). These themes were not found in the other interviews that afternoon, but they recurred in this interview. More than one student in this group took advantage of the access to music to “chill” from time to time.

The adults at MediaClub respected the students’ pleasure in peer collaboration; we were thoughtful about whether or not we approached the students as they worked and how we approached them; frequently, it was the students who would invite us to assist them. By the time of the video games module, three years into the life of MediaClub, we often found ourselves standing in the centre of the computer lab while the students worked around us. We used the time for collaborative reflection on the students’ responses to the pedagogy. In several of the interviews, the students offered up explanations of their engagement and good behaviour.

- St 1 In MediaClub the teachers that let you have, like, they’ll, they’ll make sure your day’s not boring or anything. Teachers in the class, they, they try not to make it boring, but they have to what they’ve been told to do.
- St 2 They don’t shout at you.
- R Here at MediaClub, ok?
- St 2 They don’t have to

In these comments, the students indicated that it was the interesting work at MediaClub that produced the good behaviour. By their account, teachers “don’t have to” “shout at you” when you are engaged in learning. As will be recalled, this was one of the premises of URL redesign activities. The project acknowledged the engaging effects of intellectual demand and substantive conversation. In other interviews that afternoon, students also commented on the relaxed adult-student relationships at MediaClub: “there’s a lot of people in a normal class who don’t want to do the work so the teachers have to be a bit more strict.” From these data, it seems that the students attributed in-class behaviour to interesting activities and interested students. This view is found throughout the data set.

It is notable that the students were able to analyse the social bases of the relationships at MediaClub. It will be recalled that some of the students attributed boring in-class work not to their classroom teachers, but to their teachers’ lack of control over what they taught: “Teachers in the class, they, they try not to make it boring, but they have to do what they’ve been told to do.” By way of interpretative context, it should be noted that this comment was made at the end of the first year of implementation of the new national curriculum and the new level of prescriptivism that had accompanied it.

While learning was an important dimension of MediaClub, so too were social relationships. Strong and positive relationships developed between students and adults. Karen, for instance, looked forward to afternoon tea time each week for it was a time to sit and talk with individuals and small groups of students. Genuine relationships of some depth emerged from these interactions over the weeks and years. It was this quality of relationship that enabled the playful banter between students and researchers evident in our opening vignette. Strong and positive relationships also developed amongst the students. When asked why they attended MediaClub, many students nominated social reasons. In some cases,

MediaClub was a place for hanging out with friends from class; in others, it was a place for making new friends. In response to a question about what they would miss at MediaClub, one student made the following comment to the agreement of his peers: “missing all the cool people around here, like Grade 7s never ever get to meet the little kids like Grades 3 and 4 cos they just hang out with [Grade 7s]”.

Finally, there was evidence that at least some MediaClub participants took up roles as media experts in their classrooms and families (see also Dooley, in press, a,b). In the focal term, some of the students indicated that they had done this. With respect to the help offered, they spoke of assisting siblings and adult family members. When they were asked whether they showed people at home how to do things learnt at MediaClub, the students in one of the interviews replied at length.

- St 1 My, my Grandpa... I was telling him about MediaClub and together we, we made a movie with um, with a different program, it didn't even take us long [unclear] we got a video from YouTube and we cut, we cut some bits out [unclear] and then we put a photo of me at the end and a couple of other things
- R Ok, that's great, do you guys, the other guys, do you other guys do things with people at home sometimes
- St 2 Yeah, I help my mum sometimes if she doesn't know what to do on like word doc and stuff like that
- St 1 Older people aren't good with computers
- St 3 [unclear] they came out of a not technology world and then all of a sudden in like 3-4 years technology started to evolve
- St 2 My mum needs a lot of help in finding things, the only things she knows how to do is to find things on Facebook, she doesn't even know how to make Word or Powerpoint. My brother and sister go: “find it yourself”. Snobby snobs.

Less elaborated variations of these comments are found throughout the MediaClub data set. We had some evidence then that our critical aim of skilling students up as media experts for their worlds in and out of school was achieved.

In summary, the adults and students at Media Club negotiated the creation of a comfortable and productive space for digital media production learning and use. Although it was a structured program, MediaClub was nonetheless a place where the students could hang out with friends. Given the value the students put on the learning, MediaClub was a pleasurable place for all – adults and students. Moreover, at least some of the students used what they had learnt at MediaClub to mentor others at home and in the classroom. What were the critical outcomes of this space of teaching and learning?

Discussion and Conclusion

Critical literacy is a pedagogic project contingent upon the relations of power (Freire & Macedo, 1987) that bear on the schooled and everyday lives of students and their teachers. The data from the focus term point to three critical outcomes. These relate to media production, the digital expert role, and moments of critical social analysis.

First, as a program of media production, MediaClub gave students skills for creating their own media products rather than “play[ing] what other people have already made.” While media production is not in itself critical (Jurich & Meyer, 2012), media production skills are necessary for critical literacy in the digital worlds of the second decade of the twenty-first century (see Woods et al., 2014). Such skills enable the transformation of media texts.

Second, MediaClub participants mentored family members in digital media production. This can be understood as a form of social action (Janks & Comber, 2006) in which students were agents of literacy development within communities where such skills could not be assumed. In the focal term at least some of the students showed some critical consciousness about the social provenance of the skill deficits of “older people” who “aren’t good with computers”: “they came out of a not technology world.” Moreover, there was some evidence of insight into the relations of power that reproduce this disadvantageous generational divide: “My brother and sister go: ‘find it yourself.’ Snobby snobs.” These data point to the beginnings of what Freire and Macedo (1987) refer to as critical consciousness.

Third, and similarly, MediaClub was a space in which there were some unexpected moments of critical social analysis. In the focal term, some students described classroom teachers who were boring because they “have to do what they’ve been told to do” and students – themselves included – who didn’t always behave well for those teachers. The push for standardisation noted in the Australian (Exley et al., 2014) and International literature (Lewis, 2014; Moore et al., 2014) has become an object of critical reflection for these students, further evidence of glimmerings of ‘critical consciousness’ (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This consciousness seems to have emerged from both experience of a “different” space of literacy learning at school, albeit an afterschool space, and the opportunity to engage in serious talk about such in interviews which authorised students’ voices.

Our analyses of MediaClub, as was found in Jurich and Meyer’s (2012) research, suggest the critical potential of afterschool spaces of media production. Such spaces can complement the critical spaces of the in-class program; but like them, what counts as ‘critical’ or ‘resources for criticality’ is contingent upon the relations of power that bear on the lives of participants. In particular, we would suggest the importance of responsiveness to students’ preferences for what happens in the afterschool space; the creation of such a learning space can itself be a democratic experience in which teachers’ technical authority is recognised in a structured program of learning, but teacher-student relationships are not unduly hierarchical. In a world in which there are pressures for increasingly authoritarian pedagogic relationships (Woods et al., 2014), this is a potential worth seizing.

Acknowledgements

In this chapter we report data produced as part of an Australian Research Council-funded project. We owe a debt of gratitude to the *MediaClub* students and families, volunteers, assistants (Mary Buto and Katherine Doyle), artists and teachers. We also thank the teachers, students and administrators at the school and the parents and Indigenous elders. We acknowledge the work of our research colleagues on the project: Vinesh Chandra, John Davis, Michael Dezuanni, Amanda Levido, Allan Luke, Kathy Mills, Wendy Mott, Dianne Sesay and Annette Woods of Queensland University of Technology and John McCollow and Lesley MacFarlane of the Queensland Teachers Union.

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