

David Melone
ESPY 415
Case Study 1

I think this case brings up a lot of interesting questions, a lot of which have been covered by my classmates above. I would like to break down the question into its component parts though: the rubric of the assignment itself, the nature of video as a composition, the fact that only one student read the book, and its YouTube permissibility.

From a philosophical standpoint, the techie in me would cheer than the students took the effort in producing a video piece. That shows initiative and if I was really impressed by the quality of the video, then I would trust my own feelings and probably give the students a good grade. A lot goes into the production of a movie, the choice of music (from the description I assume it is self-written), blocking, scripting, etc.; and I would trust that by necessity of the coordination and logistics involved the everyone participated in the production. This sort of remixing shows how the novel still has persistence and relevance today, and the students are bringing their own experiences to the assignment and making something meaningful using the tools and milieu in which they are most comfortable expressing themselves. It's a great example of analyzing a text and reframing it against today's values and social issues ...but...

Only one student read the book. I would have to assume the assignment was to read "Huck Finn" and in the spirit of collaboration, I would want each student to bring their own clean interpretation of it to the assignment. If one student reads it and relates the story to the rest of the group, then they are getting that student's own biased version of it. A movie falls under the same criticism, you get one director's interpretation of it. "Huck Finn" had other themes going on in the story besides "N***** Jim" but I wouldn't object using this theme in the story as the choice of subject for the video. In light of this concern, I would ask the other students in the group to submit an additional reflection piece on the project so they could at least process some of the choices made in selecting the theme and music for the video so you can have something deeper come out of the experience than a fun weekend with the movie camera while the computer-savvy student mixed the project late one night in a cracked copy of Final Cut Pro. I would also want the rest of the group to read the book as I can only assume it was a requirement for the project. What raw materials were these students working with: one student's interpretation of the book, or a shared concern over 19th century treatment of African-Americans in the deep south?

At my job, student work is legally considered school property since we are an art and design college, so this wouldn't be an issue...however I am sure it would be playing during faculty curriculum meetings. If we take the age group down to a high school level, I am sure most parents and administrators would balk at the idea of posting it, and unfortunately the politics of the matter would outweigh any of my personal feelings about it. My own private feelings would be to share it with everyone, and I would probably email an edited version to friends to brag about it.

As far as YouTube goes, most districts have stated rules about this, so I would obviously defer to those as I value my job. I don't believe personally that the decision lies with me. I would ask the students to consider cutting an edited version (with bleeps) but not openly encourage posting it to YouTube if they expressed a desire to post it. Use of the N-word is never okay, no matter what social or ethnic group you belong to, and I could not support that. Some might argue that sometimes its use can be empowering (but only if used by blacks, as a meta-descriptor, and in certain situations) but any word that needs such a rule book to even be considered appropriate definitely is not appropriate in a setting such as school. I can understand this point of view as someone who has a couple of Ice Cube and Dr. Dre albums on their iPod, but I wouldn't want to have to explain this to an angry parent. If the students want to make a case for featuring the word as a social metaphor, they can justify this in the reflection essay. I do want to support the effort made as long as the assignment was completed by everyone in the group, including reading the book and having some "meta" time to explain its inclusion in the video.

The New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. Harvard Educational Review. 66.

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Case Study 2

If I had been the teacher in question, I wouldn't have graded them down. But I imagine this would be cause for some lively discussion anyway as this can be a fairly charged topic. I will try to address each point and then offer a summary. We researched topics of multiliteracies and globalization and how they are already shaping our pedagogy. But in the context of a real classroom at the levels we struggle with...there is a sensitivity that needs to be respected. I hope I would have enough patience in this scenario to refrain from saying "because I said so" or blaming the district.

"... but when you require something you are saying 'X is better or more important than Y.' What makes it better or more important? If someone could get the main ideas of the book better by watching a film version, what's wrong with that?"

The Simpson's actually make a few Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn references if I recall correctly. Would you know them if you saw them? What is your definition of "better"? Would something that is "better" entail a more exciting story? Is something that speaks to you own experiences better? If so, I would love to see a justification, and then you can actually get a grade from me and I will hand deliver it to the decision makers. I will also defend it in the meetings where curriculum like this is decided. Extra credit given for projects that cite this article:

<http://www.jstor.org/pss/822021> and this:
<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/projects/tysse/SIMPSONStings.htm>

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was not held in very high regard when it was first published. It was a novel that seemed to get so-so reviews based on a quick search of Wikipedia. Novels like Mark Twain are very revealing of the times and it is considered a classic since much modern literature can be more appreciated by studying the past. This is an American Literature course and most of the readings are prescribed by the curriculum, but maybe we should talk about what qualities make a "classic" and we can discuss why Mark Twain should or should not be in the pile.

Another pipes up, "Another book by a dead white guy. Why is a British import like Shakespeare required reading as part of the 'American' tradition, when Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Chinua Achebe or Maxine Hong Kingston are delegated to the 'ethnic reading' lists, if they get included at all?"

A large part of history and American culture, for better or worse, has been shaped by European traditions: art, literature, thought, religion. But you are correct, different voices have been there all along as well and should be taken into account. Now there is more of an opportunity than ever to make these voices heard. I am impressed by your knowledge of the other texts on the reading list, if others agree that this is an issue; let's use this assignment as a way to put together a proposal as to why we should focus more on these other authors.

"Yeah, and better and more important to who?," complains a third student. "I know you're trying to 'Americanize' me – but maybe I don't want to be 'Americanized' in this way."

(writing this from the point of view of an “alive white guy”)
I am not “finger quotes” America anymore, we are so much more diversified and come from all of these different backgrounds...but we are part of the same ecosystem and overlapping cultures right now. You are “America” just as much as you claim that I am. Show me a well-rounded response to something that you see as “Americanizing” in Huck Finn. I want you to get an emotional response to this and express your understanding of it in the most profound way that you can...and I will call that literacy.

“A fourth student says, ‘If you say it's better and more important because 'everyone' reads it, that seems like a circular argument to me. Everyone reads it because they're required to, but they're required to because supposedly everyone reads it...and let's be real – even in this class half the students are using Cliff's Notes or reading web sites about it instead of reading the whole book. So what are you accomplishing by this 'requirement?' ”

Are the main ideas enough? Literature is supposed to evoke feelings and help the reader get to a better understanding than the sum total of plotlines, characters, and themes that you can find in

the Cliff Notes. The particular wit and social commentary that Mark Twain used and how he used it provide a much deeper understanding of the times and social issues than a film or Cliff's Notes can do. You are probably correct that it is a circular argument, but this book has been studied for decades because it has prompted many heated discussions exactly like this one.

It is a requirement since the district said it was, but I also feel it is an important novel and has stood the test of time. You are inferring that this is some sort of punishment to "make" you read the book? Well I would ask you what would be a better option. It says here that we should be discussing "American Literature." Within the parameters set by the learning outcomes listed in the syllabus, what would be a more appropriate activity? I would be open to having you work in groups to present to main themes in Huck Finn if you can demonstrate a deep enough understanding of the cultural themes discussed by Twain to really impress me. I won't necessarily require that everyone reads the text, but I need proof that everyone contributed equally and each student will need to write a personal reflection piece to illustrate this.

"...You can tell me that was the language of the times, but it's disgusting and offensive and I don't have to put up with it. Then you tell these other students THEY can't use it. I think that's hypocritical."

So how do you feel about rap music and the use of the word today? It is obviously still out there, and your classmates touched upon that with their presentation. Staying shielded from the intolerances that exist today isn't possible anymore. But this isn't even the main point of Huck Finn as a novel, and one of the major themes in this book is the relationship between Jim and Huck Finn and Huck's realization of how there was more to Jim than what society considered him: an escaped slave and human property. So if you want to discuss race relations in this book we can, but outright rejection of it because of the dialogue is exactly why this book has been banned so many times. I told your classmates that they could not use the word since it is so controversial today and it wasn't used in the context of bring light to these themes in the text. We need to look at the cultural context of this. What is the bigger intolerance: shutting out an important literary voice because of a word, or the negativity and history behind it?

A sixth asks, "Where is my voice in this reading list? My people's voice? You want me to learn to read and write your words, in your ways, in your voice. What kind of 'literacy' is that?"

Literacy isn't just reading and writing, it is reviewing, criticizing, remixing, and understanding it in terms of what you go through everyday. I want to hear your voice, because that right there is literacy. From your experiences, work with me on what Huck Finn has to offer you? Huck Finn isn't just the voice of a dead white guy, it is also the voice of Jim, the rest of the slaves depicted in the book, and the underclass that was developing in the Mississippi Basin in the late 19th century.

What do you do when "critical literacy" isn't just directed at the content of the texts in class, but also toward the ways in which these curricula and reading lists are put together?

The students here are challenging the curriculum and they have a right to do so. I can almost envision this sort of situation and this would likely scare the bejesus out of me if I had this sort of class revolt. In the sort term, I would offer the class a voice in determining the next project from an expanded list of readings. I would also lighten up on the scope of resources the students could use with the request that they avoid the "standard" references like Wikipedia and dig a little deeper through the web. Multimedia or mash-up presentations will be considered as well.

Much of the issue here is due to the students not coming from the same historical perspective of the author. As students of varied backgrounds and cultures they both contribute to and are the audience of their own "multiliterate" development. Kellner pointed out that emigration patterns have created the challenge of developing the right curriculum tools to cope with a new world, but the very audience we are attempting to reach are the one shaping this new world as we speak (2004). These students are shaping their own world and value systems in a way that postwar children never had a chance to. In this example, the steadfast adherence to the book and the assignment is backfiring because there hasn't been a discussion about the cultural relevance of Huck Finn to this particular class. There are many ways that Huck Finn can be broken own in terms of race and class relations and you can even get into

post-Civil War politics and the Reconstruction, so to save face in the short term I would try to focus my discussion on that. New London Group (1996, as cited in Luke, 2007) cites that critical literacy is a way to cope with increasing globalization. In this instance, let us question the cultural relevance of Huck Finn from an African-American perspective. Analyze Jim's role in the story, was he an adequate depiction of an African-American male in the 1880's given the real state of race relations after the Civil War? What are other literary examples from that time period? What would Frederic Douglas say about the book given he was alive when it was published?

But there definitely needs to be some longer term reform in this curriculum as the requirements and materials aren't speaking to the students. If we follow Luke's definitions (2007) of different methods of teaching literacy, we should perhaps reject the traditional "Americana" view of Huck Finn and instead focus on looking at the historical treatment of different themes and how do they play out today? If we move from the fantasy view of Huck Finn to a more "glocalized" version then perhaps a more constructive, learning debate can occur. Flexible requirements and a focus on outcomes is needed as we are leaving much of the choice up to the learner and we are asking them to take their own position in the text on their terms. This type of pedagogy would accommodate YouTube videos and whatever other ways the students have at their disposal to present their point of view in meaningful ways.

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Case Study 4

Ms. Wilson's fourth grade class has a death in the classroom. Smoochy, their pet hamster, has passed over to the great beyond.

Ms. Wilson asks the students what sort of pet they would like to get to replace Smoochy. Several voices call out "a mouse," others call out "a fish," and a bit of an argument starts to break out.

"Okay, okay," she says on a whim, "We'll settle this by vote. Two days from now, on Friday, we will hold a secret ballot to decide."

Over the course of the day, she recognizes that she has struck an educational gold mine. Kids are eagerly looking up election histories about US campaigns on the Internet. Posters start appearing: "Mice Are Nice," and "We Wish For Fish." Kids with clipboards are polling voter intentions, calculating percentages, making bar charts, budgeting their meager campaign funds. Other kids are drafting position papers, laying out the arguments for and against each kind of pet. Others are researching the different species of mouse and fish, their expected life spans, what they eat and how to care for them. There is a flurry of energy across the classroom, as the Mouse Party and the Fish Party seek out allies, strategies, and arguments for their views.

For the first time in weeks, Ms. Wilson has zero behavior issues to deal with, and even notoriously sullen kids seem genuinely caught up in the excitement. She decides to set aside her plans for the rest of the day and shifts toward encouraging the students to find new ways to use history, math, science, and language arts in their new project.

Of course, the principal picks the next day for an unannounced visit to the classroom. Kids are lying on the floor scrawling posters, others are scurrying around the room buttonholing undecided voters, some are putting up bunting and balloons for the anticipated victory party. The textbooks and worksheets are sitting unopened in the kids' backpacks – and Ms. Wilson can see on the principal's face that she is in big trouble.

Okay, Ms. Wilson, what do you say?

(Extra credit: Would you describe this as a "virtual experience"? If so, why? If not, why not?)

I wouldn't worry if the principal popped in during this controlled chaos. Of course, there would still be some explaining to do...so here goes:

I would recount the passing of the beloved class pet and the discussion that prompted the whole issue of what the "new" pet be. I would then attempt to explain things in terms of a more thought-out lesson plan even though I'd have to think on my feet. The objective is clear, this is a little bit of a civics lesson: what goes into an election. It is an election year after all, and the students are seeing all of this playing out on the news between McCain, Obama, and Clinton. They should get a better understanding of what happens leading up to the election. Of course I would need to identify the different tasks involved, campaigning, polling, research and how the students divided up responsibilities. I would also need to come up with some outcomes. With some quick thinking it would be an easy situation to explain.

I'd continue on to point out the students that had a history of behavior problems, mentioning that they'd been working well in self-led groups, collaborating and sharing responsibility with other group members. The shy students are taking charge and displaying initiative. The students are truly immersed in this project and sharing discovery...my role as teacher is just herding them along and encouraging them as they create their campaigns to choose the next "Smoochy."

Is it a virtual experience? I think this could be characterized as a virtual experience by Burbules' (2004) definition. It falls well within the "four processes of engagement through which immersion happens (interest, involvement, imagination, and interaction)." The classroom has turned into a campaign office/convention, temporarily losing a lot of the familiarity of the traditional classroom functions and trappings. It has become a new place that students are moving through and controlling in their electioneering. In another sense really, this virtual experience is a very real experience just layered on top of the typical functional classroom that students experience.

Burbules, N. (2004). Rethinking the Virtual. Retrieved on May 23rd, 2008 from CTER Moodle Website. Pages 8-11.

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Case Study 6

I think that the idea of an anonymous debate such as this is a great tool and an opportunity for some revealing discussion given the right atmosphere and amicable climate...it could work. What we have described in the case here is an example of this type of instruction backfiring. While anonymity may offer an opportunity to speak candidly, it does not mitigate against the possibility of how others may react to incendiary or provocative comments from others. As noted by Turkle (1995) (as cited in Burbules, 2002), "these experiments can be subject to abuses - where playing with an alternative identity can become impersonation or deception (the legendary "Alex" affair, in which a male psychiatrist posed in a women-only chat room as a character named Joan), or where playful online interactions can have dire real-world consequences..."

Experimentation using "alternative" online identities is all well and good as a tool for exploring unique perspectives, but within a larger group of students you have the very pragmatic issue that some will not take the assignment seriously and use the opportunity to abuse people. Some may use the opportunity to speak up when they normally are reluctant to do so in a face-to-face debate, but what is demonstrated in this class are student expressing controversial views (which may or may not be well-received) but these evolved into personal attacks.

I would most likely interrupt the discussion and terminate it. I would also go over what happened during the debate to try to see if there are hurt feelings or any chance of "real life" retaliation. Depending on how the class settles down after this sort of discussion I would try to work with them to see if they felt the idea of using anonymous identities/screen names was even beneficial to begin with...should it matter if we are anonymous or not in an immigration reform debate? If they would like to continue with anonymous screen names, then I would only do so until there was a more complete acceptable use or netiquette policy in place that would terminate the lesson if personal attacks ensued. Student dialog and identities would be monitored to make sure things remained civil and any students violating this would be held accountable. If a student was threatening to go through the administration to complain, I would take this very seriously. But if the anonymity was actually a part of the instruction, then the onus is on the instructor to prepare for these issues (abuse of the anonymity) and the students to follow through and keep their comments civil.

Online identities are not completely separated from the actual person. You may want to present as a 62-year-old woman online when you are actually a 35-year-old grad student, but you still react emotionally as a 35-year-old on the your side of the keyboard. Here are still ties to the real self since you still perceive everything through that particular lens. Burbules (2002) continues to say "We don't lose our bodily identities when we act anonymously or pretend to be other than we are." But the relative anonymity of online interaction can suppress the effects of prejudice or discrimination." While it may suppress our own prejudices if we lurk anonymously online since we don't know with

whom we are chatting, it is just as easy to make broad and unsubstantiated judgments when there is a lack of information about the others in your chat room or group. Given the tendency of many to feel freer to express themselves online, it is also easier to lash out or react quickly and rashly to those with differing opinions or ones that challenge people on a personal level. This dangers need to be managed by an attentive instructor ready to pull the plug if the environment becomes “unsafe” for their students.

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Case Study 8

To cast internet access and net filtering as a paradox is an over-generalization in my opinion. While it may be contradictory to deploy aggressive filter strategies to “protect” students from inappropriate content while this same technology has not reached maturity, it can and *will* be fixed as programming and usability of these filtering protocols are further developed to be smarter and more adaptable to user behavior. Earlier technologies sought to filter through a brute force approach but did not have tools to allow administrators to “white list” certain terms in context: such as “breast cancer” as described elsewhere in this topic.

A paradox is something that by definition is inherently contradictory, being both false and true at the same time and irresolvable. Within the context of the digital divide, a better choice would be the mass deployment of technology in schools as a result of industry intervention as a “public service” while no training or post-deployment support is offered. This is something that Burbules, et al (2006) touches on in their third critique of the digital divide concept in light the “distributive justice framework” and the concept of “if you build it, they will come.” I had the opportunity in my first “techie” job to be the webmaster and “online project manager” of Smart Valley in northern California. This was around 1996-7 when there were huge government subsidies given to company’s to help infuse technology in schools and public services where the “have-nots” were defined, i.e. inner city Palo Alto and Los Angeles. Through initiatives such as NetDay and PC Day 1 and 2, we worked on behalf of companies like Hewlett-Packard and 3Com to deploy hundreds of computers in schools. We provided training in the short span of time after these initiative to get teachers and administrators over the initial hurdle of turning them on and getting to the internet (sponsored by Intel!) but the discussion boards showed exactly what happened after all this was said and done. The technology became quickly out-of-date and little support was offered for curriculum development and integration. I was in charge of the “Resource Co-op,” a site designed to allow teachers to upload lesson plans to a database so other teachers could access it and share examples of computers in the curriculum. No one submitted anything. I am certain it wasn’t through lack of trying, but the main failing of the Smart Valley initiatives were a lack of sustained follow through and *educational* support (not technology support per se). Smart Valley 2 has tried to pick up where Smart Valley 1 left of as we “sunsetting” the initiative in 1998 claiming success as we “did our job to deploy technology” but as the readings suggest, it isn’t enough.

Dropping computers and technology into teachers’ laps and expecting them to know precisely how to take advantage of them with 100% efficiency to revolutionize test scores and student performance is a pipe dream. Sometimes technology is not the answer, but it is the scholastic culture that needs rethinking. The OLPC initiative (<http://www.laptop.org/laptop>) is one I am watching with close interest as it is providing low-cost laptops to third-world areas where the globalization inequities in technology are most apparent: Africa, South America, etc. This laptop doesn’t run Windows, but a

simplified thin client operating system designed for student collaboration and web surfing. Early reports are showing that most of them are using the systems for gaming (sort of parallel to the India example in our past readings) but there is extended support being offered in the form of local outreach and professional workshops. Globalization and the lack of adequate support resources is a much more pressing example of the digital divide as it exists today. As Burbules, et al (2006) point out, the concept of a digital divide is multilinear, haves and have-nots by older definitions are more difficult to define as the access in developed nations is now there, but we don't know how to take advantage of it. Ten years ago, it was a much easier debate as there were two-sides, but as some nations and regions have moved beyond this into bigger, deeper issues, some regions of the world are still "have-nots" in every sense of the word. The challenge for us exists in how to bring the lessons learned to other regions that are just now beginning to struggle with the question of access to technology is the most fundamental sense and if it really is an answer to inequality issues.

It is easy for me to type out this essay now as a "have." I am on vacation in Las Vegas by the pool on a laptop with a wireless connection. The digital divides that I typically experience with my peers are ones of *digital acclimation* rather than access, use, exposure, or choice. Instead of construing divides as paradoxical and something that cannot be resolved, I would rather hope that we could bring lessons learned to other divides along this continuum and help other educators, social programs, or even governments along in some of these issues. Time as well as smart and sustainable planning and training can offset some of these divides, but we must keep perspective as new divides will surface as technology and society develops.