Book Review
Children, Film and Literacy
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Children, Film and Literacy by Becky Parry (2013). Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

We know today that media education can enhance literacy skills. However, there is too little literature about the connection between children's development of literacy skills and film production. In her book, *Children, Film and Literacy*, Becky Parry demonstrates the powerful connection between the three. The book is an adapted version of Parry's dissertation involving case studies of six UK primary school students using filmmaking practices to enhance their emerging literacy skills. She created and taught a special class with year 5 students at a primary school in Sheffield, UK (equivalent to fourth grade in the US). Parry used action research design to investigate how the six students understand and interpret narratives by creating different filmmaking activities. The book begins with four chapters devoted to literature review of (mainly British) media education, followed by research methods and the context of the study. Parry describes her findings and concludes with suggestions for incorporating filmmaking in primary schools.

The literature review showcases how to use media production in the classroom and explains how film classes at the primary level can contribute to advancing the understanding and interpretation of narratives for diverse learners with different literacy skills. Parry connects multimodality (Kress, 1997) and cultural studies (Buckingham and Shefon-Green, 1994) to the current British literature on children, popular culture, and production (Bazalgette, 2010; Buckingham, 2003; Burn & Durran, 2007; and Marsh, 2005). Parry's unique position brings back the new literacies discourse to focus solely on film in the age of converging media.

The book is aimed toward readers who are interested to see the connection between children's engagement, understanding of film, and their emerging literacy skills such as analyzing and producing narratives. Both educators and researchers interested in media literacy would benefit from Parry's exploration. The author starts by outlining the broad background of semiotics and constructivism, referencing the work of Barthes, Vygotsky and Bruner. She then reflects on her personal experiences with film, and how they shaped her personal identity and understanding of narratives. Parry then connects the current research on children's play, media production, popular culture and identities with literacy skills. Her philosophy of film pedagogy with children has active, affective and aesthetic aspects, as well as social, cultural, and semiotics approaches. In order to see the benefits of the book and its contribution to the fields the reader must share Parry's view of film education as a way to empower students by using their own popular culture references to explore narrative structures.

Following the cultural studies approach to media literacy, Parry advocates for using popular culture in the classroom to engage children and to develop their literacy skills. She positions herself on the empowerment side of media literacy, criticizing research that addresses children as vulnerable and in need of protection from popular culture. She explains that her focus is on children's understanding and interpretation of narratives

using filmmaking activities and film. Her unique interpretation of multimodality (Kress, et al., 2005), positions her research as an important voice in the media literacy discourse. Parry suggests a distinctive view that connects film analysis, reflection, and production to young children's literacy skills. Unlike previous researchers who have looked at the uses of popular culture in the classroom, Parry goes beyond to explore issues of engagement, identity, and critical analysis.

Parry defines her research method as Participatory Action Research (PAR) applying the work of Freire and Eisner. She purposefully chose six year 5 students—three girls and three boys, ages nine to eleven—to be part of the special class that she taught and documented. Out of the thirty volunteers, she picked six children who demonstrated diverse approaches to films and filmmaking. These interviews are described in Chapter 6 and portray each participant's background and love of film. She uses a qualitative approach, claiming that her case study of six students cannot be generalized but can be transferred to other educational settings (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). At the same time, she dismisses the use of validity and triangulation, claiming these are quantitative terms. However, I believe that if Parry wants her research to affect policy changes, she should address the issue of trustworthiness by considering Lincoln and Guba's adaptation of validity and triangulation as they apply to qualitative research methods.

Parry's choice of videotaping as a tool for data collection is highly relevant to media literacy research. However, there are not enough details and examples, aside from some pictures, to describe benefits, limitations, and procedural matters that apply to this type of data gathering. Despite these weaknesses in research design and reporting, Parry's qualitative research approach offers many descriptions of the participants' experience of analyzing, interpreting, and producing films, which will be beneficial for media literacy educators.

The book gives rich information about the context, the participants, the researcher, and the activities. The findings of her research are showcased as vignettes and help the reader delve into the process of children's meaning-making as they use their personal interpretation of film and their collaboration skills to create narratives. Parry's special class with her six participants included three different filmmaking activities. During the first activity -- paper animation -- three dyads created drawings of their characters while explaining to Parry the significance of and inspiration for their creative choices. The second and most challenging activity was the stop-motion animation using drawn and Plasticine superheroes. During this activity, the participants faced many technical difficulties and expressed their dissatisfaction with the results. Parry decided to describe only two cases of moving from two-dimensional figures to three-dimensional characters. Retrospectively, she explains that the figure-drawing activity was more effective for building the understanding and creating interpretations of the narrative. In the third and last activity -- live-action film -- two groups divided by gender, created two different movies. While the boys created an action/dancing movie, the girls first tried to produce a fairy tale, but ended up with a PSA to raise money for charity after realizing that their initial plan was not feasible.

Parry specifically acknowledges the complexity of film education work that aims to bridge the gap between academic subjects and popular culture. On one hand, she criticizes the in-school pedagogy of writing that she observed, explaining that it minimizes the relationship with students' background knowledge of popular culture narratives. On the other hand, as documented in prior studies (Grace & Tobin, 1998), issues of transgression and pleasure emerge as children create their stories. Parry also observed some children self-regulating their stories to conform to what they thought was appropriate. At the same time, she observed other children who were creating work that challenged school and teacher expectations. However, there is no mention of her providing tools for reflection or even crating a dialogue about the reasons for these transgressive or conforming choices. She did choose to collaborate with a teacher who was open to exploring how each technique applied the children's understanding and interpretation of narratives from popular culture, but there is almost no mention of pedagogy.

In her concluding chapter, Parry presents a well-articulated argument where the findings support her theoretical claims as well as the existing literature on play, popular culture and literacy. She argues that previous research and her findings justify the use of film in the classroom despite the current trend in UK policy toward removing media education and the study of popular culture to focus on "real" science and literacy. She states that the use of popular culture and real life experience as they affect the children's constructions of narrative helps to build their emerging literacy skills. She emphasizes the connection between creative activities incorporating popular culture and enhancing school literacy. However, the omission of her role in guiding these activities weakens her argument, especially for policymakers, who may wonder how this work occurs in classrooms who do not have a researcher or filmmaker as a mentor, participant or observer. Still, the work has great value in offering examples of how to bring popular culture, especially films, into the classroom.

As part of her advocacy to bring popular culture in schools, Parry decided to criticize critical theorists such as Giroux who "writes extensively about Disney as a global phenomenon rather than taking into account how children respond to any particular Disney texts" (Parry, 2013, p. 11). Indeed, Parry represents a version of the empowerment approach following Williamson (1981/2) and Buckingham (1998) who talked about the importance of critical analysis using popular culture texts to promote students' voice and engagement instead of merely condemning big cooperation and delegitimizing texts that students consume. However, Parry does not consider how students' favorite texts can be critically examined in class without diminishing students' voices, thus missing an opportunity to reconcile protectionist concerns and empowerment approaches.

Parry focuses on children's voice, but does not address or analyze issues of power. For example, when the young participants created characters, Abby chose to call her character Panthena, whom Parry describes as being "brave and clever as well as beautiful. Panthena is also 'a match for anyone'" (Parry, 2013, p. 130). This description does not include a discussion about Abby's choices and self-reflection on her character's media representations and gender stereotypes. The celebration of student voice and work is important, but so is the ability to reflect on and monitor the reproduction of representations and stereotypes. While using popular culture is essential for engaging students, it is equally important to be able to analyze and explain these choices, even with ten-year-olds (Hobbs, & Moore, 2013; Kellner & Share, 2005). Parry's writing is critical in relation to the British education system, but her instructional practices as a teacher are not described as such. Addressing issues of transgression and critical literacy in the classroom are extremely challenging (Grace, & Tobin, 1998). And yet, the media literacy field has explored ways of balancing, negotiating and integrating protectionist and empowerment approaches for three decades (RobbGrieco, 2014). Such explorations allow current educators to emphasize students' voices while applying a balanced pedagogy that brings the pleasures of popular culture engagement to the class and reflects on them critically without being one-sided (Baker, 2012; Hobbs, 2011; Scheibe, & Rogow, 2011).

The significance of this book is in its thick descriptions of children's experiences as they are connecting their narrative interpretations of film with production. Nonetheless, in order for teachers to use films as Parry advocates, there needs to be a more coherent instructional strategy. The absence of coherent pedagogy and teacher's presence raises questions regarding instructor's position in shaping children's literacy skills. Adding popular culture into the curriculum is a necessity that the media literacy research acknowledged three decades ago. Parry's research provides descriptions of students' experiences that are crucial for making a case for using media literacy in schools. However, we should have complementing research about the instruction to show how the results that Parry demonstrated can be achieved in different educational contexts. If we want to bring filmmaking into the classroom, we should provide, alongside descriptions of benefits for students, a structured pedagogy that could serve as a model for incorporating popular culture and students' self-expression. By having more studies on both students and teachers' experience with popular culture we will be able to create a momentum to advocate for integrating filmmaking into schools.

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