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Media Education: Benefits for Students and Teachers at Alternative High Schools

Jiwon Yoon

INTRODUCTION

> The term 'at risk' indicates an ill-defined segment of the student population, manifesting everything from social maladjustment to membership in a minority racial category. Specifically, a student can be thought of as at risk if he is subject to inadequate parenting (Strother, 1991), illiterate, comes from low-income homes, suffers from a 'cultural mismatch' between home and school, or lacks the necessary life experiences to participate successfully in school (Garcia, Pearson, & Jimenez, 1994)

(Quoted from Rayle, 1998, p. 244)

These days, an increasing number of students are categorized as "at-risk" students, according to their performances at school, apparent behaviors, and the social class of their family. Even though education seems to offer them the promise of a bright future, a mostly monolithic education system and a rigid curriculum doesn't meet the various needs of many students. Many young people fail to adjust to this system and are marginalized more than ever. They are not able to succeed in the mainstream factory school system. Because the mainstream system appears to be incapable of instituting deep structural changes, alternative schools were suggested for those who wanted, or needed, to be educated out of the mainstream (Sagor, 1999). Educators believed that this would allow remaining students and faculty to focus without any hindrance by trouble-makers and without distraction upon academic performance (Leslie, Meagan, Rich & Bill, 1998).

While various pedagogies should be able to satisfy the needs of these students at alternative school, this paper suggests media education as one of the most effective pedagogies to help these students in versatile ways. The goal of this paper is to explore

how media education can satisfy the various needs of at-risk students in an alternative high school.

Educational Goals of the Alternative Schools

Even though different groups of students might have different ideas of what they need to get from an education, fulfilling the general educational goals of all students is still necessary. The same goal would allow different groups of students and educators to look at the one direction and head toward the same goal, even though the paths to that goal might vary. If certain groups of students keep receiving segregated and unequal education and do not master the skills that other mainstream counterparts do, such disadvantages are unlikely to be overcome. Actually, many graduates from alternative schools are usually given fewer job opportunities than students from the mainstream. (Sagor, 1999).

So what is usually considered the central educational goal of a school system? A Jeffersonian view of the role and function of an education is to foster the intelligence needed for democratic citizenship (Sagor, 1999; Kaestle, 1983). This has been considered as the most fundamental goal of an education in the US. Upon this, Carl Glickman added that students' educational experiences should be related to a whole range of future opportunities (Glickman, 1993, quoted from Sagor 1999).

While every student should be nurtured for democratic citizenship and future opportunities, specific educational concentration is also necessary to more effectively meet the different needs of each group of students. The general education purpose of all alternative schools should be to provide more concrete ideas of what marginalized students need to get from their schooling. In *The Retransformation of the School*, Daniel Linden Duke (1978) suggests seven goals for alternative school:

1. Explorative Goals: Students should be provided with lots of unscheduled time to pursue their own interests.
2. Preparatory Goals: Even though the most common preparatory objective for some is to get into a college or be well equipped for employment, many schools have different targets and objectives depending on the urgent necessities of their students. According to Duke (1978), the basic objectives are usually gainful employment and social adjustment.
3. Revolutionary Goals: Students should be prepared to interact with others who are

not held in high regard or supported by mainstream ideology and to be actively involved in social and political activism. Students are often taught with learning materials that do not contain any racial, sexist, and class biases.

4. Participatory Goals: Students should be given the chance to practice democratic processes and responsibility through exercises of decision-making.

5. Therapeutic Goals: These goals focus on the individual student and help him/her to learn about themselves, their feelings and reaction to others.

6. Academic Goals: Students should be given options involving various courses and other learning opportunities.

7. Demonstrative Goals: Many alternative schools pursue a lighthouse function and exist as a demonstration center illustrating a particular approach to education.

Characteristics of At-Risk Students in Alternative Schools

Since the success of the second chance programs is measured by how the programs meet the needs of a specific population (Lange, 1998), knowing the particular needs of students is critical. Therefore, the specific characteristics and needs of at-risk, underprivileged, and marginalized students should be thoroughly examined. The following list contains some general problems of many at-risk students, as identified by educators and scholars.

1. Unsuccessful academic achievement

Alternative school educators say that many students at alternative schools have reading problems and other additional learning problems, such as attention deficits and difficulties in processing information (Duke & Griesdorn, 1999). However, most alternative schools didn't have specialists for dealing with reading and learning disabilities.

2. No interest in school

Many students are placed in alternative schools because of their attendance problems (Miller, Fitch & Marshall, 2003), initiated by many different reasons, such as poor relationships with peers or teachers, deficient academic abilities, and boring or too difficult school activities. Such a lack of interest in school discourages students and results in poor performance at school.

3. Collaboration

Every adolescent needs to learn how to socialize and collaborate with others, and

school is the crucial place to learn and practice these skills. Since many students at alternative schools have chronic behavior problems (Miller et al., 2003), it is assumed that it will be harder for them to do group work.

4. Sense of belonging

Whether students voluntarily have come to the alternative school or have been forcefully placed there by authority, most students come after dropping out of the mainstream public school system. Many alternative schools are known as second chance programs (Lange, 1998). Since students dropped out of the institution they originally were in, it is sometimes hard for students to have a strong sense of belonging.

6. Cultural Capital

Many students at alternative schools are from dysfunctional or low-income families whose parents are not well-educated. These students are less exposed to the cultural materials that are valued by higher income families, who are in power, and whose values and attitudes align with schools and society. The cultures shared by poor and underprivileged groups of people are hardly recognized and appreciated by the public, because people who have the power to introduce the culture to the public and to adapt in the society as a whole do not appreciate cultures of underprivileged groups. Therefore, students who were born in wealthy families and have had much exposure to the cultural capital valued by people and institutions in power are more likely to hold power in the future than students who were born in the low income families. This can be an ongoing cycle if the gap between underprivileged students and mainstream students is not filled in.

Media education

Recently, the importance of media education has been stressed because the mass media is becoming the central source of information and a dominant leisure activity for most citizens. However, students have gotten very little instructional support in learning about the mass media (Hobbs, 1998).

While many media educators have their own definitions and criteria when discussing and practicing media education, such as protectionism, technology education, and democracy education (Buckingham 2003; Tyner 1991), media education usually focuses on the following three areas: 1) the nature and characteristics of media industries in a social context; 2) media texts analysis; and 3) media production, from which

students learn the styles and methods of the production of newspapers, magazines, film, video, web pages (see also Anderson & Ploghoft, 1993).

In many cases, media education is seen as a tool that can be used to protect vulnerable young people from harmful or problematic mass media content which supposedly may have negative influences on children and adolescents. Youth crimes have often been attributed to the sexual and violent content of mass media. Also the media are seen as responsible for promoting consumerism or materialism (Buckingham, 2003), and media education was frequently mentioned as being useful in protecting young people from the negative effects of media (Tyner, 1998), or at least as a means of inoculation that may prevent contamination (Buckingham, 2003).

However, changing views towards young people's media experiences have enabled educators to build more constructive goals for media education. (Tyner, 1998) Children and adolescents are now often regarded as an active, critical and independent audience rather than a vulnerable and passive audience that absorbs what the media produces. Now, media education accepts students' existing knowledge of the media and helps them to make informed decisions based on what they already know (Buckingham, 2003; Fisherkeller, 2000). Media education helps students to have a better understanding of and active participation in the media culture around them. Here, the goals of media education are to prepare for a democratic citizenship and more democratic and inclusive forms of media production in the future. (Buckingham, 2003)

Media Literacy

Media literacy means the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, reflect, communicate and create a message in print, aural, and visual forms of communication (Hobbs, 1998; Goodman, 2003; Fisherkeller, 2000). In the media, images and sounds not only supplement written or spoken words, but also communicate the message by themselves. (Goodman, 2003). Some types of mediums include TV, film, radio, comics, novels, music videos, video games, the Internet, computer software, and computer games.

Highly media-literate people are expected to be able to be aware of not only its conveyed meaning, but also of embedded values and ideologies by recognizing inferences and understanding what is behind conveyed words, images or sounds. In

addition, media literate people should be able to participate in the discourse of culture and society by using media technologies (Buckingham et al., 1995).

METHODOLOGY

In order to observe how media education can benefit underprivileged students, I conducted participatory observations and interviews with students and teachers at Educational Video Center (EVC).

At EVC, students from seven different high schools, both public and alternative, participate in a documentary workshop as an after school program. According to Ivana Espinet, a co-director of the workshop, more than 70% of the students are academically unsuccessful and at-risk students. EVC has more students from alternative high schools, which are either second-chance programs or programs designed to serve specific populations, such as new immigrants. Some students are allowed to leave school early and participate in the workshop because teachers believe that if students participate in the workshop or other after school activities, they may become hooked on school rather than drop out, which might happen if they stayed all day in their original school.

In the workshop, students learn media analysis and video documentary production, which allows them to produce a couple of short clips involving Public Service Announcements and street interviews on certain topics and, one final documentary on a topic decided by students. I observed three classes at the documentary workshop at EVC: On the first visit, I participated in the screening of their first project which involved producing short public service advertisements on which they received feedback from the audience; on the second visit, I witnessed students learning how to interview people on the street, and I followed them on the street to interview people on topics related to youth involvement in the presidential election; on the third visit, I observed students reflecting and commenting on their street interviews from the previous day, and I followed another class doing their street interviews. I also joined the students when they were hanging around with their peers during a break and before and after class.

During these observations in classes and intermissions, I took filed notes about lessons taught by teachers, interactions between students and their teacher, as well as among students, and students' reaction. They were participatory observations because I was a part of the class, assisting class sessions to help an instructor lead the class. Before

and after each class, I was also able to talk with students, which allowed me to ask questions about how they felt about the program in their natural settings. More formal interviews were conducted with teachers and current and graduate students from EVC. All interviews were audiotaped.

The data from participatory observations and interviews were analyzed based on the educational goals of the alternative school and the characteristics of underprivileged students, which were discussed earlier in this paper. I categorized the data according to the goals of alternative schooling, which are explorative goals, preparatory goals, revolutionary goals, participatory goals, therapeutic goals, academic goals, and demonstrative goals, and what underprivileged students are usually lacking, which are academic achievement, interest in school, collaboration, a sense of belonging, and cultural capital. (Duplicated characteristics are integrated.) After categorization of the data, they were carefully analyzed and supplemented by existing literature on the issue.

RESULTS:
BENEFITS OF MEDIA EDUCATION IN AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

1. Academic Benefits

Most students at alternative high schools are academically lagging compared to students at other public or private schools. Many underprivileged students do not have highly educated role models who can guide and motivate them. Rather, they are often abandoned without much care and support (Pappano, 2003). Here, I'm proposing media education as one pedagogy that could help these at-risk students.

When practicing media production, students have to decide on a topic before they can go forward. Since video production involves group work, students as a group discuss possible topics. They present, question, argue and try to convince each other in the process of choosing the topic, which allows them to explore a number of possible themes. Students carefully choose the subject according to their interests and target audience. The topic determines the areas to be investigated, types of people to be interviewed, and other visual supplementary material, such as background and music. Students conduct further research to develop their narration (Tyner, 1998; Goodman, 2003). Then, they create interview questions based on the research, and make a complete storyboard about the chosen topic. After that, they shoot the interviews and supplementary footage. Finally,

they edit what they've shot and end up with 15 to 40 minute documentaries. Throughout this process, the students are actively connecting and engaging themselves in every aspect of the topic and the process of video construction. Through the process of applying their knowledge in practical work, their knowledge becomes solid and concrete because vague understandings, previously not clearly expressed, are now made clear.

Media education can help students to develop their literacy directly by giving them opportunities to write and develop narratives. In the process of production, educators can employ several writing exercises. For instance, at EVC, students use writing to clearly formulate their ideas and to summarize, in writing, what they have heard as well as what they have seen while logging videos (Goodman, 2003); additionally students write in-class journals almost every day.

Explaining the logging process further, students write down all of the dialogue, sounds, and camera shots from the clip, while judging quality and potential use in a final product. This exercise strengthens not only writing, but also their observation skills by detaching sound from picture and describing in writing everything they watch and hear. They even take everything apart from every scene, dissecting the words, tones or rhythms, body language, clothes, and activities in the background. As students create a big picture of the final video and put together the disparate footage from the original texts and sometimes reorder them, they have to decide on the potential value of the segments to be included in the final tape. They also need to use their imagination to construct a narrative (See also Goodman, 2003; Buckingham et al., 1995).

Documentary production workshop at EVC also integrates media analysis in its curriculum. In the process of media analysis, genre, character, plot, thematic development, and authorship are often observed and evaluated (Fisherkeller, 2000), as literature is taught at school. Since students are already familiar with the character and narrative features of TV programs, they can actively participate in discussing these criteria. Popular texts provide "a strong and engaging point of departure for the purpose of provoking critical inquiry and even for leading the students back to the texts sanctioned by the dominant culture" (Tyner, 1998, p.61). Through media analysis, students are disciplined to develop critical reading, critical listening and critical observing skills which can also aid students in becoming proficient in print literacy (Tyner, 1998). Literacy is perhaps the major determining factor of academic success

because the vocabulary students bring into the classroom, their ability to read and write, and their levels of comprehension decisively influence their studies.

Students' learning skills and intellectual capacities are determined by the integration of various factors. In the long term, students who are trained to think critically are very likely to increase their academic aptitude, because critical thinking will aid them in being active learners. Many abilities and skills that are enhanced by media education, such as "strengthening narrative, problem solving, research skills, skill-based learning with media equipment" (Tyner, 1998, p.189), will certainly help students to be critical thinkers. As students learn many other possible modes of expression and styles, they become "more academic, literary, or problem solving in purpose" (Tyner, 1998, p181).

2. Media Education and Participatory Democracy

One of the primary goals for American public education is to prepare students to be democratic citizens who are knowledgeable about the society they live in order to be actively involved. (Sagor, 1999; Kaestle, 1983). However, the reality is that certain groups of people have less opportunity to speak for themselves, partly because they are not well-educated enough to express themselves clearly and persuasively, and partly because they have less access to channels to make their voices heard. These two factors, among others, make it difficult for marginalized groups to participate in public discourse. Politically marginalized groups often include non-whites, women, the poor, the working class, and, very young or old people, but not necessarily.

Most students at alternative high schools have parents who are categorized as *marginal* in society, and these students also are likely to be trapped in their marginalized group because of their social background. For their whole life, they might be seen as a member of a minority due to their ethnic and family background. Education should be able to help these marginalized students to be active citizens in a democratic society by informing them about what is going on in their society and other societies, and by encouraging them to speak out and let their voices be heard. However, in many public education systems, the questioning of rules, traditions and authorities is considered undesirable, except among the elite top students who are expected to join the professional/managerial class (Ross, 1999). Most of the time, marginalized and inner-city young people are "rendered voiceless and invisible to the outside world." (Goodman,

2003, p.23)

Traditionally, being literate involved controlling the media which allowed the voices of marginalized groups of people to be heard, enabling marginalized people to demand their political and economic rights. Being literate is having knowledge of and being able to participate in cultural and social discourse (Fisherkeller, 2002). However, besides print media, other technological media are prevalent in contemporary society, requiring people to be media literate in order to speak out for their rights (Goodman, 2003). Therefore, media education can contribute in various ways to empowering marginalized students and encouraging them to be democratic citizens. For example, it can motivate them to seek additional information about the society to which they belong and it can make them more aware of the processes of knowledge and authority construction (see also Giroux, 1999). It can inspire them to speak out and to participate in a public discourse. Being literate requires people to think about the issues, though, of course, they may choose to remain passive observers. (Buckingham et al., 1995)

One of the ways to help students to be more active as democratic citizens is by educating them about the system in which the mass media was created and how the mass media functions today. (Fisherkeller, 1999) Examining and analyzing the mass media industry, such as the structure of media organizations, commercials, rating systems, consumer institutions, and ways the media make a profit, would give students much clearer ideas about today's corporate-dominated culture (Buckingham, 2000; Fisherkeller, 1999, 2002). Education about media systems and symbolism would enable students to view critically how the media are an inseparable part of their lives and society, and how social changes can happen (Fisherkeller, 2000).

Extending this idea further, educators can assist students in constructing their identities and imbue them with a sense of social power as successful members in a corporate-dominated culture (Fisherkeller, 1999). They can first closely observe how they and their communities are portrayed and stereotyped in the media by people with cultural power. Then, they can use the media to speak for themselves and their communities and present their own identities as they see them (Tyner, 1998). Proposed documentary topics by EVC students, such as: "youth in prison," "police brutality and racism," "peer pressure," "suicide," "unprotected sex," "teen pregnancy," and "why some teens neglect their child," show that these students are acutely aware of and have great

concern about certain social issues around them (Goodman, 2003). These topics are directly related to problems they know about or are perhaps personally experiencing; these topics also reveal that the students see themselves as being unfairly perceived and neglected by the mainstream society. Through the media education process, students can more closely examine their own environments and social relations in which they are involved (Goodman, 2003).

Media production involving such topics, or even involving the students' own experiences, would encourage students to become actively involved in solving these problems (Fisherkeller, 1999; Tyner, 1998). As multiply literate media producers, students can frame their own identities and positions in society, present different perspectives on various issues, and also suggest significant topics of discourse which have not been treated in the commercial media (Goodman, 2003; Tyner, 1998). Students' work can reach even beyond the traditional conception of independent media production (Tyner, 1998). Using the camera, or other media, to spotlight social problems and their possible solutions would give students a stronger sense of power in society.

In addition, through both media production activities and close readings of the media texts, students can learn to decode the symbolism, language and vocabulary that are used in the mediated discourse. With these newly learned vocabularies, they will be able to better investigate and address issues, and articulate their opinions in the public through the mass media. By drawing attention to specific social problems that they are familiar with, students will become more active in their communities. (Goodman, 2003; Tyner, 1998)

3. Group Work: Importance of Cooperation

One of the essential goals that educators have for students is to teach them how to socialize and collaborate with others. This needs to be accentuated more in alternative school settings, especially schools designed as second-chance programs, because many of these students are found having more difficulties in practicing socialization and collaboration. All educators in alternative school settings have agreed that many of their students have very strong personalities which sometimes put the students in conflict with the school's agenda (Miller, Fitch & Marshall, 2003)..

When I was talking with three graduate students from EVC documentary workshop, the most frequently mentioned benefit of the documentary workshop was

learning to work with others as a group. To the question of how he would evaluate the program, Kellon, a graduate from EVC who now works as a teaching assistant, said:

> As a student, I didn't actually think about what was the impact on me yet. I first came here to get out of school.... As a teaching assistant… I started to realize that… not the video production is the most important part necessarily but more about group work, meeting new people, not necessarily think about what you want, but what other people may want. You kind of feel like I'm representing more than myself. (October 20, 2004)

Regarding the documentary workshop, all three graduates mentioned the issue of assertive students and shy students. They said that usually in the beginning of the semester, it's always eloquent people who push their ideas forward and always shy people who usually don't object. However, as time goes on, vocal students listen more while quiet students express themselves more. Kellon said that EVC forced him to break out of his shyness and share what he had in his head. When I asked Ivana Espinet, a co-director of the workshop, about any significant differences in students at the start of the program and after they finished the program, she mentioned the students' skills involving working as a group as the most dramatic change. The shy kids generally get a little bit better in speaking up, and outspoken kids get a little bit better at listening.

According to Kyle, who completed both a documentary workshop and an advanced documentary workshop, the good thing about working as a group is that students get to know everybody, both their weaknesses and strengths. Since they know the strength of others, they could always go to the appropriate person if they had any problem. He also said that working with other people enabled students to accept the fact that their ideas were not necessarily the best, even though they may have put a great deal of effort into them.

At all stages of the documentary workshop, from choosing the topic stage to the final edition stage, the students decide everything as a group. Actually, this collaboration approach is not confined solely to video production, but applies to most media production activities. Producing radio programs, publishing newspapers or magazines, and even designing homepages is mostly group work. The collaborative nature of media production gives students the chance to work as interdependent learners. They learn to solve conflicts, collaborate, teach and learn from each other (Goodman, 2003). By

working as a group, students would have "a wider range of perceptions, experiences, and cultural reference points at its disposal than any teacher could have" (Masterman, 1985, p.29). Finally, students in a group will hopefully be able to experience the liberation and support provided by working with friends (Buckingham et al., 1995). As students learn to respect each other's ideas and thoughts, they may obtain a higher sense of self-esteem, stemming from the fact that their ideas are counted and respected.

Group work also strengthens students' leadership skills. Throughout the production process, students learn how to negotiate conflicts, how to listen to others, how to express their ideas clearly. They have to consider what is the best for the group not for the individual, which is a very important characteristic of a good leader. The production activities also give students the chance experience the role of directing, in which students make decisions on the shots. Educators from both EVC emphasized the directors' responsibilities to be aware of every detail of what was happening on the stage and off the stage. Since many marginalized students rarely have the chance to lead and direct other people, the group nature of media production can give them the experience of being a leader and developing leadership skills.

4. The Fostering of Responsibility through Teamwork.

One virtue that can be developed through group work is responsibility. Sometimes, unsatisfactory academic achievement or a failure to function properly in an institution is due to a lack of responsibility. Many at-risk students often do not care even if the consequences of their failing will have a negative lifetime impact on them. However, when working as a group, people often begin to feel more responsible and develop a sense of obligation, because the consequences affect not only themselves but also other members in the group from whom they may want approval. Everybody in the group suffers together if one member neglects his/her responsibilities.

In the documentary workshop at EVC, students learn that they cannot carelessly or insincerely put forward their ideas because their ideas are considered by the whole class and the ideas might negatively or positively influence the whole class rest of the semester (Goodman, 2003). As students gradually learn that their ideas are worthy enough to be respected by the whole class, they will become more confident of themselves and see themselves as indeed being confident and responsible. Students also have to meet many new people to obtain relevant information, to get interviews, and to

ask permission to enter certain places and videotape them. This experience is very different from meeting new people in the classroom or neighborhood; it more closely resembles meeting people in the workplace as professionals.

Another feature of video production that develops a stronger sense of responsibility in students hinges on their seeing the results of their hard work in the near future. Unlike most school work that is merely graded, they can see their efforts as fruitful labor, especially when their final product is shared with an outside audience. Even though media education through production doesn't necessarily require students to complete their work (Buckingham et al., 1995), the video production process teaches students that it is important to finish their work (Goodman, 2003) in order to achieve the desired outcome.

The topic of the documentary also requires students to be thoughtful. Since students usually choose a topic dealing with serious social issues directly related to their and other people's lives, they are subject to a spoken or unspoken pressure not to speak or act imprudently and frivolously when dealing with the topic, especially when meeting people to talk with about the issue. Goodman (2003) describes the experience of one student who became more serious as a worker and a student through these situations.

5. Therapeutic Effects of Media Education: Personal and Interpersonal Insights

Many at-risk students have experienced or are experiencing emotional difficulties: they may be going through harder times than other students of their age group due to family problems, relationships with their friends or teachers, economic difficulties or other personal problems we may not even be able to imagine. Therefore, Daniel Duke (1978) included therapeutic goals when describing the objectives of an alternative school. This goal focuses on the individual student and helps him/her gain insight into the areas of emotions, relationships and reactions. Here, I would like to illustrate how media education, especially video production, can help students to better understand themselves and their feelings and reactions to others.

When I visited EVC for the screening of public service announcements produced by the students, I was able to also participate in a feedback session. The feedback came after the screening of each clip which was shown three times. The audience first got a chance to give "warm feedback," which means they could give only complimentary and supporting comments. After warm comments, the audience gave "cold comments," or

suggestions as to how their clips could have been improved. The audience also could ask questions about the parts of clips they didn't understand. While the audience gave its comments, the producers were not allowed to say anything, except to facilitate the discussion. After all comments from the audience were heard, the producers explained their intentions and the purpose of the film.

This was their first time to present their piece in public and get comments from people outside of class. Even though they were not supposed to answer or explain while the audience was giving feedback, students showed a tendency to defend their work or blame others, especially those who were absent on that day. However, their teacher always stopped them when they tried to defend against the cold feedback from the audience. Also, when students attributed some mistakes or faults to other students, their teacher told them that everybody was responsible for the work.

The three graduates I had interviewed all mentioned how their attitudes during the feedback session had changed as the workshop went on. Christopher said that since most students only got feedback and comments when they made mistakes or did something wrong, they had a strong tendency to defend themselves against critical comments from their peers and teachers. However, over time, they began to learn to take the cold feedback as not being personal, but rather appreciate it because it could help them to produce better work next time.

As Christopher mentioned, many of these students are not used to getting applause; therefore getting warm feedback, regardless of the quality of their work, can help give students confidence about their work and themselves. According to Espinet, the reason student are forced to give warm feedback first is because people are good at criticizing others' work, but often not very good at giving supporting and encouraging comments. She wants viewers to think hard about the good features of the clip even if they are very hard to find (November 12, 2004).

Students might feel they are unfairly being criticized by getting cold feedback publicly. But as they get used to receiving cold feedback without being defensive, they may start to realize that it is okay for them to make mistakes and there is always a positive side to everything. Also, ideally, this may be the starting point of emancipation for their guilt for their past mistakes and wrong-doings for which they have been heavily blamed by others.

In addition, participating in group work allow students to learn about not only others but also themselves. Three graduate students of EVC mentioned that working as a group allows students to become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of others. In addition, working with others allows people to learn about themselves as they go through the various stages of production. They discover what they are good and bad at, not only skill-wise but also interpersonal-wise. Students come to realize which areas they are most sensitive about, which areas frustrate them, how they react in conflicts, and how positively/ negatively they influence the whole group when working together.

Such knowledge about one's feelings and reactions to others can lead students to examine themselves more closely. Why am I become so sensitive about certain issues? Why do I feel comfortable with certain people and not with others? What makes me so frustrated about this while I'm so cool about other, more serious matters? Do my characteristics have anything to do with my past? If so, which part of my past influences me so much? In-depth understanding of oneself from group work and investigation of oneself can be the starting point of unweaving tangled problems.

The process of making a documentary on a social problem related to the students' lives allows the students to go through an intense experience of looking inward and outward, revealing painful personal stories. Instead of separating intellect from emotion, the media production process can bring the two areas together by encouraging students to externalize their personal stories by sharing in a group and presenting through media in public (Goodman, 2003).

6. Prepare for the Future: Media Education and Career Opportunities

One of the primary objectives for all students is relating the students' educational experiences to a whole range of future opportunities. Even though not every student wants to work in the media industry, media education can serve as a stepping stone for those who want a future in media fields and provide option for those who might end up working within the media industry. Also, we are living in a media-saturated and image oriented society, where the ability to use the image and media technologies gives one an advantage in competitive power (Buckingham, 2000). Many workplace environment has been reshaped by different forms of communication and requires computer skills of some kind (Fisherkeller, 2000). Media education can help qualify students to survive well in our image oriented society. This education is especially helpful for underprivileged

students who have less access to media technologies, such as a computer or recent software.

7. Benefits for Teachers: Academic and Psychological

Media education can benefit not only students but also educators, especially those who are in an alternative school setting. Media education allows teachers to know their students better and to build more intimate relationships, compared to other educators with different subjects.

First, media education provides opportunities to teachers to get to understand their students better because students often reveal their lives both through the media production and through sharing their media experiences (Goodman, 2003; Fisherkeller, 2002). As students get involved in production, they often choose the topics or themes that are important in their lives. Also since students understand, interpret and experience the media within their own socio-cultural contexts, educators can encourage students to share their media experiences by means of their actual life circumstances. From what students reveal in the production process or through media experience sharing, teachers may better understand what kinds of problems students have, how they are burdened, what kinds of things or issues they feel uncomfortable with, and where they see injustices in society (Goodman 2003).

Media education also allows teachers to build intimate relationships with students. Media educators are often the ones who understand the culture of young people the best. As they learn about students' media experiences in their real life circumstances, this knowledge can be used to get closer to students. This may lead students to consider their teachers as the ones who can understand and appreciate their culture. Furthermore, integrating media education into the curriculum would allow teachers to have the "powerful and wide-ranging repertoire" that is required for teaching academic subjects effectively (Goodman, 2003, p. 64).

7. Alternative Schools as Demonstration Centers of Benefits of Media Education

At present, media education is not for the most part included in the mainstream curriculum of high schools in the US. However, many alternative schools and after school programs have already implemented media education in their curriculum. According to Daniel Linden Duke (1978), alternative schools often act as a demonstration center to illustrate a particular approach to education. Because the

mainstream system is often incapable of instituting deep structural changes (Sagor, 1999), alternative schools can be experimental because many of their students were dissatisfied with or not successful in mainstream education. By providing media education, I argue that alternative schools can benefit the mainstream education systems by demonstrating how media education can be taught in the classroom, and how media education can benefit students.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though I have listed the characteristics and needs of at-risk and underprivileged students, students' characteristics cannot be generalized because every student is different due to his/her socio-cultural background and personality, especially in a very diverse country like the United States. Every student needs to be well-educated according to the defined educational goals, which are determined by the needs and values of society.

In the U.S., general educational goals are often seen as requirements that will provide the knowledge needed for democratic citizenship and will equip the individual with skills related to a whole range of possible future opportunities. However, many students are not successful in public schools. Some common problems that these students share are unsatisfactory academic achievement, no interest in school, a more external locus of control orientation, lack of collaboration skills, no sense of belonging and a lack of cultural capital compared to other groups of students. They perceive themselves as not part of the mainstream culture, marginalized at an early age.

In this paper, media education is suggested to benefit these students at alternative high schools, especially in developing their academic skills, being equipped to be a democratic citizen, doing group work, and developing responsibility skills. Also, media literacy benefits students to get therapeutic effects. However, media education is not a cure-all; it cannot solve all the problems of at-risk students. What I have suggested here is rather a set of possible ways to improve the educational process. These are starting points for helping students, particularly at-risk students. The results may not be as satisfactory as those I have described here. However, educators should keep in mind that education is not an overnight thing, but rather an evolving process and new techniques and technologies should be parts of the on-going evolutionary process.

The nature of media education is very appropriate for alternative schooling.

Three interrelated factors for successful alternative schools have been defined as: 1. a sense of community, 2. Engaging instruction, and 3. The organizational structure to support them (Gregg, 1999). The collaborative and self-revealing nature of media production allows students to have a sense of community; media education allows students to be actively involved in the class; and finally, different types of media education can be implemented through media production and analysis of different medium.

Some of the solutions I have discussed may not be seen to be directly related to the problems confronting at-risk students. However, "learning in one situation facilitates learning or performance in another situation" (Ormrod, 2004, p.361). What students have gained from media education can be transferred and effectively utilized in many other areas of life, including the workplace and personal relationships. Also, I believe that the positive effects of media education will motivate some students to complete their education and make schools more interesting and exciting to them.

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