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## Latino Media and Critical Literacy Pedagogies: Children's Scripting of Telenovelas Discourses

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### Abstract

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Using elements of the ethnography of globalization and teacher research, two Puerto Rican researchers and educators worked collaboratively with a teacher on a study conducted in a third grade classroom in a public school in an urban community in Puerto Rico. They conceptualized children's curricular engagement with the Spanish television genre of telenovelas in relation to classroom critical literacy and performative inquiry where children's histories, their lives in hyper-globalized contexts (through media, multinational commercialization, and technology), and their related discursive practices were made visible.

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*Today I got to a family member's house, and I saw on the table that they had received the magazine *People en español*, and it was "The 50 most beautiful people" issue. After browsing to see which Puerto Rican celebrities made it onto the list, I began counting, and 17 of the 50 celebrities are telenovelas actors: Fernando Colunga, Lupita Ferrer, William Levy Chistina Bach, Saúl Lisazo, Jacqueline Bracamontes, Mauricio Ochman..." [Translation, Field Notes, March 12, 2010]*

The above field note constitutes part of the documentation examining how telenovelas as multinational global media texts, embedded in dominant identity discourses on power, circulate in a local community in Puerto Rico. Telenovelas—melodramatic television shows highly popular among Latin American viewers around the world—are part of the repertoire of global media markets that Latino/a children have access to through their encounters with television. Issues of access and domination from a globalization perspective (Bauman, 2007; Bourdieu, 2003; Santos, 2007) are critical considerations in how these media texts circulate and are consumed by contemporary audiences in relation to the pedagogical role of these texts in classrooms.

For this article, we used elements of the ethnography of globalization (Lewellen, 2002; Marcus, 1995; Murphy & Krady, 2003) to present data from an interpretative study conducted in an urban community in Puerto Rico that included a third grade classroom as one of its sites. The researchers, two Puerto Rican university professors, one who resides in Puerto Rico and the other in Indiana, worked collaboratively with the classroom teacher on a project that aimed to foreground Puerto Rican students' out-of-school cultural resources within the literacy curriculum. Here we present one of these perspectives analyzing the students' inquiry work on the self-selected popular media genre of telenovelas. We conceptualized children's engagement with telenovelas in relation to classroom critical literacy (Janks, 2009) and performative inquiry, where children's histories, their lives in hyper-globalized contexts (through media, multinational commercialization and technology), and their related discursive practices were made visible. We specifically examined a critical performative approach (Pineau, 2005; Medina, 2006; Weltsek & Medina, 2007) to media literacy curriculum design based on the students' interests in the Spanish television genre of telenovelas and explored the following questions: What becomes visible in a curriculum that foregrounds children's participation and movements across familiar meaning-making spaces and practices? What are the possibilities for working on literacy pedagogies where new localities emerge in the classroom as a shared space for interpretation and critical analysis of global markets and networks? What complex identity negotiations emerged as the students read their lives and multiple social worlds within their interpretations of telenovelas? We examined these questions in relation to global ethnographic notions of scripting (Appadurai, 1996)—or the role of the imagination as a social practice—where echoes of global power are made visible in local contexts through imaginative engagement with real and pretend spaces. In the next section, we define these terms as a framework for theory and analysis.

## Scripting Echoes of Global Power in Performative Pedagogies

### Defining Scripting Dynamics in Global Time

Globalization social scientist Appadurai (1996) conceptualizes the remixing of dynamics at the core of local-global interactions as “scripting.” Scripting is the work of the imagination as a social practice in which, as people experience the social conditions related to globalization, individuals “re-script” their lives in unpredictable ways to accommodate, reject and/or resituate particular global discourses in local contexts. The work of Soep (2004) takes the notion of “scripting” to a concrete analytical level and examines young people’s local productions of home videos for the global influences that emerge within their production practices, particularly in relation to the construction of masculine discourses. Grounded in the work on discourse and identity formation, Soep argues that “scripting” is a way to understand face-to-face interactions in the production of local texts and performances that foreground global discourses and hybridity. In the examination of scripting dynamics, it is possible to identify “echoes of global power” (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003; Couldry, 2003; García-Canclini, 1995) to connect the ways that local social identity and ideological performances and discourses interact with complex global landscapes and ideologies.

The notion of “echoing” is conceptualized by global media social theorists (García-Canclini, 1995; Couldry, 2003) where “echoes” bring a spatial dimension to how global power is understood at various levels, such as in the repetitive ways people encounter media tools and discourses that cannot be located in one particular essential place; in people’s experiences consuming and making meaning of media across contexts, with a diverse set of tools and forms of engagement; and where authority is negotiated in different ways, creating multiple forms of relationships and interpretations. These dynamics are specifically described by global media social theorists with the following set of conditions:

1. Games of echoes are understood as the multiple ways in which people re-encounter what they see on television in everyday life in ways that one echoes another (García-Canclini, 1995; Couldry, 2003).
2. There is a subtle relationship between meaning-making and media consumption in everyday life.
3. The place of media power is multi-sided, and its authority is negotiated in different ways.
4. Media, “by providing so many shared resources through which we can frame the social world, change[s] the terms in which we can offer individual testimony” (Couldry, 2003, p. 48).

Analyzing scripting practices, or the role of the imagination as a social practice, is one way to interpret how the multiplicity of echoes of global power circulate in a local context and the ways that people make sense of, accommodate, reject, and resituate these forms of global discourse and practices in their everyday lives (including classroom work). In our analysis, we used the notion of scripting as a lens through which to consider the emerging contexts, performed identities, and political discourses that are made visible in students’ productions of telenovelas in relation to “echoes of global power” and the everyday histories that intersect and emerge as

ruptures and opportunities for critical analysis. In the following sections, we provide a pedagogical and methodological framework and examine data to make sense of how a critical performative pedagogy allows for a generative space where the boundaries, ambiguities and tensions between everyday cultural practices and knowledge production in the classroom emerge as complex spaces for meaning-making by students, teachers, and researchers, with regard to the media discourses of telenovelas.

### **Scripting in/through Performative Pedagogies**

In parallel with previous research on play, media, and childhood education (Wohlwend, 2009; Marsh, 2005; Dyson, 2003), a critical performative pedagogy in elementary classrooms creates a context from which to approach the relationship between media literacy, globalization and classroom work as both permeable and hybrid. In these “playful” spaces, or the “playshop” as Wohlwend (2013) defines it, the performances of discourses and identities in everyday interactions and in the fictions of mediated social lives, represented for example in telenovelas, could potentially become the generative force for a pedagogy that makes visible the complex and multilayered relationship between media, power, and identity (Medina & Wohlwend, in press). In a performative pedagogy, identity formation is understood, as Butler (1990) suggests, as constructed and constructing and working within and against the regulatory practices and discourses that aim to create a false or fictional stable self through “culturally intelligible grids” (p. 184) such as gender, race, socio-economic status, etc. The performative, then, is the result of and serves a purpose for public and social discourses that aim to maintain and disrupt identities within fixed “cultural grids.” When identities are understood as such, we are able to see the political constitution and the fabricated notions that frame hierarchies of power in identity constructs and how these are made visible in performative moments.

From a critical performative pedagogical perspective, all classroom events are perceived as “spectacles” that are produced at the intersection of culture and identity-in-the-making (Diamond, 1996; Pineau, 2005). The “audience-participants,” which include students and teachers, are recognized as creators within the “classroom social spectacle” that is both explored and produced. The authoritative role of a script (i.e., teacher's talk, students' talk, literary text, textbooks, media, etc.) and the idea that an actor plays a distant self (i.e., an objective teacher and students) are only recognized as part of a larger repertoire of texts and identity performances mediating learners' explorations of knowledge from a subjective and political position. Performance pedagogies make visible the cultural politics at the intersections of macro structures of power and the micro discourses that are made and remade in the performative act. In the classroom project that we share in this paper, the melodramatic television shows known as telenovelas served as the key inquiry texts selected by the students. In the next section, we situate the role of telenovelas in relation to new forms of global power to provide a socio-political framework for the analysis of micro and macro global/local relations.

### **Making Visible the Social Landscape of Telenovelas Texts: What's New in Global Times?**

Telenovelas as a global media landscape circulate and are available to millions of viewers around the world. These melodramatic television shows are described as the most popular television genre among Latino/a viewers across Latin America and the United States (Joyce, 2008;

McAnany & La Pastina, 1994 ) and are becoming increasingly popular around the world (Werner, 2006). For example, according to a recent survey by rating company Nielsen, the no. 1 show Tuesday nights on U.S. television among the key 18 to 49 demographic was Univision's Spanish-language telenovela *Soy Tu Dueña*. Nevertheless, telenovelas are not a new genre in Latin America. The history of telenovelas can be traced back to the 1950s, with a strong transnational history dominated by Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina, and accessible to multiple countries such as Puerto Rico. What has become "new" in the context of globalization is that the multinational production of Telenovelas is centralized in Miami and Mexico with an increasing international distribution, including Brazilian telenovelas, translated into multiple languages. Furthermore, contemporary plots place a greater emphasis on capitalist notions of success and material power, particularly with the inclusion of Miami as a glamorous site for characters' lives to develop. These new telenovela productions merge contemporary societal representations with traces of the Latin American history of a dominant Spanish colonial canon that makes this genre complicated to situate and analyze. Similar to other global trends in media, culture, and economics, the present global conditions are not disconnected from past histories of domination and power, such as in colonization, racism, immigration, and current financial trends related to multinational distribution of media and intensive marketing tools (Santos, 2007). Furthermore, similar to Lemke's (2009) notion of "transmedia traversals" and Wohlwend's (2009) analysis of the circulation of Disney texts, what used to be limited to a television show is now a set of products to be consumed across media, including telenovelas merchandise, magazines, music, online fan forums, television and radio tabloids, and Facebook, and the products have become integrated with people's everyday activities beyond watching the actual shows. Although many of these products are not necessarily targeted young audiences (except for telenovelas such as *Muchachitas como tú* that are intended for a teen audience), these forms of texts circulate within and around children's lives at home, in grocery stores, and through media and technology.

In Puerto Rico where telenovelas account for a major block of programming time (at least 3 consecutive hours of prime time television and 2 hours in the early afternoon), the history of telenovelas is well-established. In the past, there was a vibrant production of local telenovelas, and in any given moment a local production would run simultaneously to an imported telenovela, from places like Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, or Brazil. In the present, the Latino multinational television networks Telemundo and Univision dominate Spanish-speaking television in Puerto Rico, and most programming comes from their pre-packaged programming, including an intensive block of telenovelas.

### **Methodology**

The interpretative design of this study was aligned with the work of ethnographers working through ethnographies of globalization in local communities to understand the production of global modernity and its impacts on local processes (Kraidy, 1999; Kearney, 1995). These elements of ethnographies of globalization were combined with elements of teacher-research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992 ; Pappas, & Tucker-Raymond, 2011), in which both researchers worked collaboratively with the classroom teacher in the design and implementation of curricular engagements in the classroom, which will be described later on.

The community in which this study took place was the town of Santa Clara in the northern metropolitan area of San Juan, Puerto Rico. This community was originally established mostly as a suburb of the capital city San Juan by Puerto Ricans wanting to move closer to the capital city area from rural areas in the center of the island. At present, it is an urban community with a large population of Puerto Ricans but also a large immigrant community from the Dominican Republic. In addition, the community has gone through a transformation from an industrial to a commercial area, with multiple multinational businesses that include Costco, Walmart, Sears, Walgreen's, and Blockbuster Video; multiple fast food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell, etc., and communication technology services, such as multinational cellular telephone companies like Sprint and Verizon. These multinational businesses simultaneously co-exist with and compete with local businesses, such as restaurants, grocery stores, and other local services. The children who attend the local schools navigate these complex global and local networks on an everyday basis, including in their engagement with television. From a global-local perspective, both global media and markets are part of the children's repertoires of the cultural activities they have access to and engage with.

The first author, Carmen, comes to this study as a Puerto Rican woman born and raised in the local town of Santa Clara and who attended local public schools but now lives in the U.S. Midwest. The second author, María del Rocío, was raised five miles from the school where the research took place, and as a child she attended public schools in the larger metropolitan area that Santa Clara town belongs to. María del Rocío has worked for more than 10 years with the school-based teacher study group that focused on various projects related to the transformation of teaching practices.

### **Glo/cal Ethnography**

Although we continue working in the school, particularly María del Rocío, this part of the study lasted two years. In the years when the study was conducted, Carmen was able to go back to Puerto Rico five times per year for extended periods of time. Most of these trips constituted intense research time with large periods spent in the classrooms working with the teachers and students. These trips were combined with time spent in the community, with a focus on understanding the shifts in the community and on the merging of global networks with local practices. As she immersed herself in the everyday life of the family, she kept track of, mostly through photography, collections of everyday print materials, and reflective journals, the ways that she perceived local changes through global dynamics in place and space within this community. She also documented and became familiar with what was available through media communication, such as television, radio, and the Internet.

When in the classroom, the authors worked collaboratively with the classroom teacher, Maestra Vivian. The collaboration began through María del Rocío, who conducted a study group with local teachers on critical literacy practices. In the academic year of 2006-2007, Carmen went back to live in Puerto Rico and taught at the University of Puerto Rico, where she met the teachers in the study group. Maestra Vivian was interested in shifting her classroom from a curriculum skills-driven pedagogy to a child-driven pedagogy in which she could make use of students' cultural resources in the classroom. From a critical literacy perspective, she was interested in bringing real issues and multiple ways of reading texts to her literacy curriculum

and in expanding the boundaries of the traditional basal program in her classroom (Medina, Costa, & Soto, 2012; Costa, Medina, & Soto, 2011). Given Carmen's drama and critical literacy background, she was interested in the students' access to media in their everyday lives, and in the performative practices that they engaged with as consumers and producers of media. María del Rocío was interested in expanding the notion of literacy that was traditionally explored in elementary classrooms in Puerto Rico to include everyday literacies and popular culture in the classroom. The authors and teacher collectively decided to work on a project in which the students would select a particular topic related to their preferences for media, and the adults would plan an emergent inquiry project with the students.

To document the process, the authors audio recorded all of the research team's planning sessions. While working in the classrooms, the authors took photographs and video and audio recorded all sessions. We conducted 21 sessions total throughout 2008-2009, with the average session running approximately 90 minutes. We spent observational time at the beginning of the year (October-November) and initiated the process of selecting an inquiry topic. During March to May, intensive time was spent exploring the selected inquiry topic of telenovelas. We conducted a final focus group interview that served as a members' check to confirm some of our preliminary findings. All artifacts used and produced throughout the experience were collected. This included student-produced documents such as brainstorming and analysis sheets, drafts, and final versions of students' telenovelas. We also collected popular culture artifacts that we brought to the classroom for analysis, such as "shoppers" (store newspaper ads) and videos of television advertisements. Finally, all teacher-research team meetings were recorded. To make decisions and begin curricular design, we used a whole group inquiry approach with the children to decide on the topic. The students shared different aspects of media preferences, ranging from cartoons available through English cable television and Spanish television to commercial movies. However, there was a strong reaction when the students brought up the media genre of telenovelas and major interest in exploring this genre. The classroom almost unanimously decided to work on telenovelas. Typically, we worked with the students and then reflected to make decisions about what was going to happen next. The overall aspects of the experience included an analysis of the content and structure of telenovelas, reading literature resembling or disrupting the structure of telenovelas, producing telenovelas, and a critical analysis of the social discourses brought out in the students' production. After the work on telenovelas was complete, we designed a unit analyzing beauty discourses in the media, an issue that emerged as a result of the telenovelas experience.

### **Framework for Data Analysis**

At the data analysis level, Soep (2004) suggests that scripting is a concrete analytical lens that makes visible how "national imaginaries and globalized sensibilities emerge in fleeting face to face encounters" (p. 176) and how understanding how culture is produced and interpreted as children live in complex social worlds. To develop an analytical framework that was congruent with the concept of scripting, the first layer of analysis was similar to an overall open coding of themes, following Strauss & Corbin (1990), to examine the data in relation to the social discourses that emerged in the inquiry work (for teachers, researchers and students). Elements such as the negotiation of semiotic repertoires of symbols or re-contextualization dynamics (in print texts, music, toys, games, visual images, etc.) and the performed social discourses (such as

beauty, femininities, and masculinities) all emerged as important considerations in how the children and teachers/researchers worked in classrooms. These aspects served as the structure around which to organize and examine the data at a more in-depth level. We used Blommaert's (2005) work on discourse and re-contextualization to code how contextualization practices in discourses are local as well as translocal:

A lot of what we perform in the way of meaning attributing practices is the post-hoc re-contextualization of earlier bits of text that were produced, of course, in a different contextualization process, at a different time, by different people, and for different purposes. (Blommaert, 2005, p. 46)

The dynamics of re-contextualization between local and trans-local practices involved coding the ways students' and teachers' interpretations of texts are re-located in new contexts and the new texts that emerge in these new locations. In order to analyze the explorations, interpretations, and constructions of telenovelas, a key element was how multiple aspects merged, moved across, and got reinvented using the multiplicity of semiotic resources of telenovelas that then became newly imagined worlds in the students' work and the pedagogical practices that we devised.

Based on these ideas, within our study, the children's verbal interactions, writing, and performance production were seen as interrelated with the ways that global media networks function, the signs used in media production, and the discourses available through these shows, but also uniquely situated in the local culture, context, and history in which new meanings are produced. We coded how the students evoked and re-contextualized signs and meanings that were parts of macro global forms but that became parts of their micro local productions in the classroom. These dynamics were visible, for example, when the students analyzed how characters' embodied actions were constructed in different telenovelas in relation to beauty and gender norms, or how the selection of music for their telenovelas' productions meant relocating hip-hop and pop music in ways that acquired new meanings. In the construction of self, characters, and episodes, it was important to analyze the merging of complex signs that transcended the limits of the local but that existed in their immediate worlds as part of a repertoire of available semiotic resources. In the process, the students were reconfiguring, re-contextualizing, and integrating modes, and those became contextualization practices that were key in interpreting globalization processes.

In order to understand "scripting" and its role in the students' and teachers' imaginations as an emergent social practice, it also became important to code those moments when our ways of reading and enacting involved the reiteration or disruption of global cultural norms through discursive formations that framed the students' production work. The relationship between performance studies and cultural politics allowed us to understand how social discourses were simultaneously enacted and produced. Within the dynamics of local/global production, a site was created to unpack the reiteration and emergence of cultural norms, meanings, and critiques. What the students interpreted and produced cannot be perceived as the creation of a fixed or isolated moment, but should be seen as the overlapping exploration of past, present, and future through images and discourses situated at a time inside and at a time outside the immediate moment.



## Findings

### Scripting Beauty and Socio-economic Class as Echoes of Global Power

Throughout the inquiry process, we and the teacher, Maestra Vivian, attempted to keep at the forefront an openness to examine global media texts in ways that acknowledged people's rapport with media and viewers' desires and pleasures in watching telenovelas. Similar to Buckingham's (2003) work on media reception, we understood that people, including the students and ourselves, enjoyed watching telenovelas, and our approaches to these explorations had to be framed with this in mind. Additionally, we worked on finding ways to use the children's and our own experiences to critically reflect on the discourses of power embedded in global media. This was not only a complicated task, but it also created conflicting, contradictory, and productive decisions and approaches.

The interaction described below occurred after the students had spent some time engaging in open discussions around different aspects of telenovelas. We discussed content, preferences, structures, and themes, and for the most part, none of the teacher-researchers intervened by adding or questioning the students' responses. Our goal was to listen to children's understandings and meaning-making processes regarding telenovelas as performed spaces with unique elements and structures. The students' responses showed that they had a complex understanding of these media texts, including their hyper-sensualized and sexualized content (a risky subject in classrooms) and the dynamics of social power represented in the stories. The following transcript was part of a literature-media discussion in which, as part of the inquiry project, the students and teacher read the Spanish version of the *Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1991). The curricular engagement was meant to interpret telenovelas through the literary text.

#### Transcript

Carolina: Misi como en *Muchachitas como tú*... porque Federico solo se fija en las riquitas por cómo se ven [inaudible].

Carolina: Mrs. like in *Muchachitas como tú* [*Teenage Girls Like You*] ...because Federico only looks at the rich girls because of their looks [inaudible].

Manuel: Si. Como en *Al diablo con los guapos*. Que estaba una mujer que se llama "Gol-mili" y a ella no le importaba cómo se veían los pobres y cada vez que iba a visitarlos les limpiaba, daba comida, sábanas...

Manuel: Yeah. Like in *Al diablo con los guapos* [*To Hell with the Handsome*]. There was a woman named Mili-Gol and she didn't care what poor people looked like, and every time she went to visit them, she cleaned for them, gave them food and sheets...

Josué: [inaudible referencia a un personaje rica] Era muy orgullosa pues se convirtió en pobre entonces después cuando fue Mili a darle comida, sábanas y ropa pues le dijo la muchacha que la llevara a la casa.

Josué: [inaudible reference to a rich character] [The rich character] was really prideful and she became poor and so when Mili went to give her food, sheets and clothes, the girl asked Mili to take her home.

#### Translation

Literature discussion 3/9/09

One of the aspects we wanted to explore was how to bring literature and media together in the classroom literacy curriculum. Because the content of telenovelas narratives has been compared

to Cinderella-type stories, and the students' explorations of telenovelas were highly charged with dominant discourses of beauty, we decided to introduce a different kind of Cinderella story through the reading of the *Paper Bag Princess*. Although we understood the criticism of this kind of feminist approach to literary texts (Davies, 1993), we still found possibilities in bringing another kind of feminist discourse to the wide range of femininities that were brought up in the discussions. We were aware of the risks embedded, particularly in relation to the teacher selecting and imposing a "gender script" on the students, but we also understood that from a performative pedagogy standpoint, any "script" generated or presented by teachers would be embedded in power discourses and the historical layers of authoritarian performances that are inscribed in teachers' identities. Introducing a traditional Cinderella story would perhaps have hidden our subjective positions in relation to the students' beauty discourses on telenovelas, but hidden or obvious, those positions are still implicitly present.

What became interesting through the analysis of this transcript were the students' acts of redefining the media-literary event. Similar to Davies (1993) findings of children's interpreting feminist texts, the students did not "hear" the same kind of feminist text that we heard in selecting *The Paper Bag Princess* (1991). Rather, in an agentic move as media and literary readers, the students created a different kind of interpretive space, disrupting a vertical approach or hierarchical view to critical interpretation (telenovelas at the bottom and critical/literary interpretation at the top) into a more horizontal plane of "scripting" and making interpretations across multiple global telenovela texts within a repertoire of stories with situated meanings and complex identity performances. Their ways of interpreting allowed us to understand the process of making visible the "echoes of global power" in their work that hinted at the active negotiation of media authority by the students.

In the above transcript, Carolina's connection to the telenovela *Muchachitas como tú* [*Teenage Girls Like You*] occurred almost half-way through the discussion. In the larger discussion, this was the second telenovela reference the students brought into the conversation (*Un gancho al corazón/A Hook to the Heart* was the first). Carolina first made reference to the teacher as "Misi (Mrs.) Vivian," which is the traditional way children refer to their teachers in Puerto Rico. Carolina then made a reference to the telenovela *Muchachitas como tú*, a title that indicates that the characters' identities in the telenovela resemble those of the viewers ["they" are/look like "you"]. *Muchachitas como tú* was highly criticized in Mexico for its over-representation of light-skinned characters and lack of representation of characters from indigenous backgrounds, but it was still highly popular among young audiences from all ethnic backgrounds and across countries. This light-skinned phenomenon has been described as a global trend in telenovelas (Hecht, 2007) and one that creates dominant cultural grids of feminine identities (Butler, 1990), but that does not seem to necessarily interfere with its popularity among young audiences from multiple ethnic backgrounds. Its active audience included the children in the classroom involved in the present study, who selected this telenovela as their favorite, mostly because of its identification with global media views or trends of youth culture.

Carolina, who did not fit the beauty and size standards of women in telenovelas and who made this clear at some point in the inquiry process, was the first girl to comment on this interaction: "Misi como en *Muchachitas como tú* ... porque Federico solo se fija en las riquitas por como se ven." [Mrs. like in *Teenage Girls Like You* ... because Federico only looks at the rich girls

because of their looks.] She names and interprets the identity discourses related to the male characters' desires for beautiful females of affluent socio-economic status. What is not clear is whether the telenovela generated a discourse of socio-economic status and beauty that suggested that all rich females had a particular look or if males only liked rich females who looked a particular way.

This utterance hints at the complex ways in which forms of beauty construct socio-economic status, and how socio-economic status constructs forms of beauty in telenovelas. Either way, Carolina's participation as a critical reader of the media text indicated her awareness of how gender identities were interwoven in relation to socio-economic status, beauty, and power within telenovelas. A short time later, Manuel brought up the second global telenovela context, *Al diablo con los guapos*. The title of this media text indexes a more complex and contradictory identity meaning, in relation to positioning the content and its audience. *Al diablo con los guapos* suggests a discourse counter to traditional views of telenovelas in which female protagonist characters passively fall in love and glorify "handsome." *Al diablo con los guapos* suggests a move to reject the male dominant beauty discourses that are often found in telenovelas, but it also a highly ironic title since the female protagonist, who fits the dominating canon of feminities ends up with the rich man who also fits the dominant representation of beauty and masculinity in telenovelas. A careful examination of the students' responses created a more complex map of how beauty discourses circulated and were interpreted through this telenovela, beyond a rejection of beauty like in the *Paper Bag Princess*.

Manuel began to unpack the contradictory social landscape of this telenovela by telling his classmates and teachers about "Mili-Gol," the protagonist's, story: "Que estaba una mujer que se llama Gol-Mili y a ella no le importaba como se veían los pobres y cada vez que iba a visitarlos les limpiaba, daba comida, sábanas..." [There was a woman named Mili-Gol, and she didn't care what poor people looked like, and every time she went to visit them, she cleaned for them, gave them food and sheets...]. Mili's identity was interpreted as an outsider of lower socio-economic communities and as a woman engaged in giving to those in need. Although she was presented in previous episodes as coming from that same "poor" community, she eventually "overcame" poverty, became rich, and actively helped and protected those who remained in poverty. In Manuel's analysis of Mili's social performance, people who are "poor" are presented as disempowered or passive, who needed Mili actively to do things "for them." Those "things" Mili does went beyond providing food and included "cleaning for them," which suggests a stereotypical relationship between neatness, disempowerment, and people of lower socio-economic status. Furthermore, in Manuel's interpretation, Mili, who at the end of the telenovela marries the rich and handsome protagonist and who herself fits the beauty canon of telenovelas, helped poor people because "she didn't care what poor people looked like." Manuel's position as interpreter of dominant global media discourses was similar to Carolina's interpretation of *Muchachitas como tú*, as he made visible the interrelated politics of socio-economics and dominant feminine and masculine identities; in telenovelas, socio-economics is constructed through ways of looking, and ways of looking are constructed in relation to socio-economics. In Manuel's statement, Mili moved beyond poor people's ways of looking to help themselves in their struggles with poverty, and were defined by material goods and neatness. Furthermore, Josué's follow up to Manuel's comment introduces another layer of performed power and economic status discourses through the story of the "rich woman" antagonist who "was really

prideful and she became poor.” Here, Josué adds to the previous idea of socio-economic status and appearance in relation to power performances that suggest poverty is a punishment for inappropriate individual behavior. The “rich woman” became poor as a result of mistreating Mili, who was previously poor but eventually, because of her “good” individual actions, became rich. What the students’ comments made clear was their active meaning-making processes in relation to telenovelas as fairy tale narratives, in which performed identity discourses suggested that good behavior got rewarded with material wealth and beauty, and bad behavior was punished with material poverty and “ugliness.”

These excerpts were part of a much more complex interaction among students and teachers, but they captured how children read, interpreted and were aware of the situated meanings and of how identities across telenovelas texts echoed discourses of power within this particular global media genre. The next excerpt shows another aspect of the performative inquiry in telenovelas. Scripting echoes global power in production: Devising, writing, and performing. As part of the classroom engagements, the students worked in small groups designing and producing telenovelas. The students wrote scripts, wrote songs, and created sequences of still images with photography to perform their telenovelas. The range of texts that the students designed and the repertoire of themes and resources that they used were quite expansive. As shown through the following excerpt, the students’ designs became hybrid products in which participation in multiple meaning-making practices, identity performances, and social discourses were shown to be part of the locality that the students created in their telenovela designs.

### **Performing Woman in Struggle**

The following is a child-produced telenovela script from a group of girls who decided to write the story of a family whose mother engaged in a fight with the father and asked him to leave the house, but he refused to do so [See sequence on photos]:

“Sin corazón no hay amor”  
**[Mother]--Yo estoy feliz y vivo con mi esposo y con mi hijo y mi hija que acababa de nacer.**

[Father]--¡Dáme a mis hijos!

**[Mother]--¡No son tus hijos yo los parí!**

[Narrator]--Mientras los papas peleaban los niños lloraban.

[Father]--¡Son mis hijos no son tus hijos!

**[Mother]--¡Yo me quedaré con ellos!**

[Narrator] Los niños lloraban y lloraban hasta que lo niños querían decidir quedarse con uno de los dos

**[Mother]--¡Vete de la casa ahora!**

“There’s no love without a heart”  
**[Mother]--I’m happy, and I live with my husband, with my son and my daughter who was just born.**

[Father]--Give me my kids!

**[Mother]--They are not your kids; I gave birth to them!**

[Narrator]--While the parents fought, the kids cried.

[Father]--They are my kids, not yours!

**[Mother]--I’m going to keep them!**

[Narrator] The kids cried and cried until the kids wanted to decide to stay with one of them

**[Mother]-- Leave the house now!**

[Narrator] y los niños le dijeron a la mamá.

[Narrator] and the kids told their mom.

[Child]--Mami, ¿y donde se quedará?

[Child]--Mom, where is he going to stay?

**[Mother]--Papi ya no es tu papá.**

**[Mother]--Dad is not your father anymore.**

[Child]--¿Por qué papi no se va a quedar en ninguna casa?

[Child]--Why is dad not staying in any house?

[Child]--¿Porqué él ya no vive con nosotros?

[Child]--Why isn't he living with us anymore?

[Narrator] Y la mamá de los hijos se sintió mal porque, porque no vive en ninguna casa el papá

[Narrator] And the kids' mom felt bad because the dad did not live in a house.

**[Mother]--Niños me siento mal porque su papá no vive en ninguna casa**

**[Mother]--Kids, I feel bad because your father is not living in a house.**

[Mother]—Niños, ¿Quieren quedarse con su papá y conmigo?

[Mother]--Kids, would you like to stay with your father or with me?

[Child]-- Si mami si queremos volver con papi

[Child]—Yes, Mom, we want to go back with dad.

**[Mother]--Lo voy a llamar. [Hablando con el esposo por teléfono] ¡Tu estas borracho! ¡No lo puedo creer! ¡No volveré contigo!**

**[Mother] --I'm going to call him. [Talking with husband on the phone] You are drunk! I can't believe this! I'm not getting back together with you!**

[The story continues and the mother eventually forgives the father and lets him come back home.]

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**Figure 1:** Children play acting outside in costumes. One is dressed as infant with pacifier, and the two children behind her are dressed as the mother and father. Scene is based on female students' play script.



**Figure 2:** Children play acting in building. The one acting as the mother figure is pointing at the father figure, indicating an argument. To their left are four more children actors, with one dressed as an infant and one with a padded stomach to indicate pregnancy.



**Figure 3:** Children play acting outside, at the end of the script. Mother and father characters are face-to-face, while other characters group near a tree.

This performed *telenovela* was produced as a meaning-making site of complex aspects of social life at the intersection of everyday experiences, identity, and the structures of media culture. The imaginative social worlds, identities, and practices between global and local discourses (scripting) were at the core of how this performance was produced by the students. The characters' encounter became a hybrid set of local-global echoes between one of the girl's personal testimonies and the identities, discourses, and structures of telenovelas. The students were dealing with conflicts of gender power, and while this text should not be perceived as a literal representation of the student's life, attitudes, or dispositions (see Buckingham (2003) for a critique of this kind of claim), it was informative in examining how children understand their everyday worlds within the structures of media productions. What was important in this analysis was the children's cultural and social productions and the performed identities that were constructed within this fictional world as potential entries or ruptures into a more complex analysis of how global and local meaning intersect (an analysis of ruptures will take place later in the next section).

The overall structure of the telenovela uses a global "Cinderella" story as a framework in which the female character encountered a problem or challenge related to a male partner, which got resolved in the end, when they lived "happily ever after." The text followed what telenovela scholars define as the three global structural elements of this media genre (Werner, 2006): 1) characters live a stable life; 2) an event occurs that disrupts this balance and creates a number of other hardships; and 3) finally, balance is achieved and happiness restored. For the most part, this is the overall traditional structure of telenovelas and one that was mostly used by all of the students in the classroom. Characters' identity performances, although agentic and unique, were also constrained by the framework of traditional telenovela structures and global power, particularly in the creation of gender roles. These formed a complicated set of subtleties that were revealed within the texts and that were significant to unpack. These subtleties could be understood as part of a media performance that functioned as a resource to produce and make visible the "mediation of social life" (Couldry, 2003) in relation to power relations, agency, and emotional investment.

Take, for example, how motherhood is constructed (see script sections in bold). One of the overall features of this text was the mother's tone as exclamatory. Throughout the text, the mother's voice was represented with exclamation marks, highlighting the expression of both emotions and actions in her statements. After she gave birth to her third child, the father, for an "unknown" reason, told the mother to give him the children. Her reaction to this statement was to claim that the act of childbirth gave her right to keep the children. She decisively refused to give the children to the father, and in an agentic move, she asked him to leave the house. The children, who expressed their relationship with the father through emotions that were visible in their sadness as they witnessed the situation, complicated the mother's role. The mother firmly acted to get the father out of the house, but emotionally, she felt conflicted because of the children's concerns about the father not having a place to live and because they would miss him. Agency was mediated in the mother's story through her actions and emotions, but these also created a complex map of social life within this telenovela representation. After consulting with the children, the mother made the decision to allow the father back in the house, but to her surprise, he was drunk when she called him. Once again she reaffirmed her decision to keep the father away from the house, but eventually there was a final forgiveness and they "lived happily



ever after.” Although not necessarily the students’ lives, this telenovela is created within a complicated set of social structures and tensions.

This telenovela production was accompanied by the students’ musical selection of the song “Masoquismo” [“Masochism”] by the Latina teen pop artist Lola from the album *Érase una vez* [*Once Upon a Time*] that actually served as the theme song for a popular telenovela. The lyrics of the song, about a woman who was left by her lover but felt conflicting emotions, complemented the main theme of the students’ script. This telenovela production and the previous literature-media discussion became performative spaces to both analyze and produce meaning within the structures of global media texts. The students’ generative work created new parameters for classroom discussions of local social realities and experiences, such as in the following class discussion that followed the presentation of the telenovela *Sin corazón no hay amor*. The students were discussing the possible motivation for the conflict and the father’s departure:

Discussion	Translation
Alicia: Porque la mamá quiere comprarle esto y el papá no está dispuesto a comprarle eso.	Alicia: Because the mother wants to buy something for the kids but the dad isn’t willing to buy it.
Marcos: Ah verdad, o el dinero.	Marcos: True, or money.
Javier: Este los papás, la mamá necesita chavos porque no tiene para los hijos y los papás dicen que no le va a dar.	Javier: Well the parents, the mom needs money because she doesn’t have any for the children and the father said he won’t give it to them.
Rocío Y ¿por qué? y ¿por qué? Yo tengo una pregunta con eso...que me quedé así como que sorprendida ¿la mamá le tiene que pedir chavos a los papás?	Rocío: And why, why? I have a question about that...that left me, like, surprised. The mother has to ask for money from the father?
Marcos: Si no tiene.	Marcos: If she doesn’t have any.
Carlos: Si también le tiene que pedir por la pensión.	Carlos: Yes, also if she has to ask him for child support.
	Analysis of Students’ Devised Telenovelas 5-18-09

In this instance it was possible to see the hybrid identity discourses that emerged in which, in “freezing” and analyzing a moment in time, the role of the spectator and performer merged, as the children contemplated and enacted the remaking of the struggling mother, in relation to economic hardship. What started as an analysis of a media re-presentation and re-contextualization in their work devolved connections with the local social realities of economic struggle and affective relations. By taking time to examine their own creative work and unpacking the possible motivations framing their stories, we moved from the global media space of telenovelas to a hybridized context where local social realities were named and explored. In this instance for example, the students begin to map the complexities between affective relationships and financial struggles, an aspect these children were aware of, either through personal experiences or through access to current larger social discourses on families economic struggles. It is at this intersection of identity, discourse, and politics that we see great potential in critical literacy education through the making and remaking of media and multiple literacies. The students’ work was not about finding some kind of unified or single oppressive discourse in the



media that they consume; rather, it was about generating layers of identity and social performance that worked as reflective spaces of complex and overlapping power dynamics in relation to beauty, class, gender, economics, childhood, and social relationships.

## Discussion

### Making Visible Global Subtleties as Performed Echoes of Global Power

The consequences of the power of globalization in Puerto Rico are as complex as they are in many other places where the forces of multinational markets and media are disproportionately visible in relation to other local resources. For Puerto Rico, these new forms of domination merge with a history of other forms of colonization that have already created a range of social and cultural conditions that produce conflicting views in relation to global media consumption, production, nation-state values, and individual identity-agency (see Coss, 1996; Pabón, 1995). Living under such conditions generates in people what Bourdieu (as cited in Bauman, 2007) described as “the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being,” or the desires to belong within dominant colonial cultural grids, while at the same time working to claim the uniqueness of an identity situated in local everyday cultural practices. These dynamics of both fitting in and resistance to complicate the linearity of any interpretative framework and pedagogy that attempts to unpack the impact of new forms of media globalization in Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, what is important to this study, that worked on a curriculum that made visible how echoes of global power circulated in relation to media in Puerto Rico, was our (students, teachers, and researchers) collective ability to work with possibilities and contradictions, and to use those as ways to reflect and move the inquiry process forward. Within this complexity, as social media theorists argue (Strelitz, 2003), it is possible to see the subtle mediations interplaying in people’s relationships with media that need to be located in the wide range of socio-political landscapes that people negotiate. With this in mind, we summarize a number of important points related to the implications of this study.

One of the important aspects of the students’ inquiry work on telenovelas was how the students demonstrated their capacity to respond to media globalization as active producers of meaning. Their participation in global-local spaces was embedded in active decision-making and interpretive practices, in which the children were able to read across communities and texts in dynamic ways. In Carmen’s previous work with Latino/a immigrant children (Medina, 2010), she borrowed from Guerra’s (2008) work on the notions of “Writing Across Communities” to explore how, when provided with rich opportunities for literary response, children with experiences living across cultures were able to make use of and put at the forefront of their literary experiences complex intellectual, imaginative, and political knowledge as transcultural citizens, and that more importantly, they used this knowledge to mediate their identities as active interpreters in classroom literary practices. Without falling into a relativistic use of the phrase “across communities,” we would like to suggest that for children who “stay” in one place but who live in social conditions where multiple cultural practices are produced at the intersection of global and local resources and ideologies (as Appadurai (1996) describes in his concept of *scapes*), the idea of reading, writing, and producing across communities could also serve as a powerful lens for engaging in the creation of expansive classroom critical literacy pedagogies. For example, the children in Puerto Rico participating in *The Paper Bag Princess* reading event read across media and literary texts and interpreted the social landscape of telenovelas, showing how gender performances were constructed in relation to beauty, class, and power. The students demonstrated their active work as reading subjects who could provide coherence to the multiple echoes of global power that are constituted and produced in telenovelas. In this sense,

engagement in reading across media sites provided a useful pedagogy for a multiplicity of discourses, performances, and representations to emerge, and for understanding of how media landscapes and the students' responses work at "doing gender" in ways that both could be looked back upon and reconsidered. It also became clear that by piecing together the range of gender performances available in telenovelas, one might be able to understand the pervasive nature of global media. This insight still proves to be a challenge in our work in relation to critical literacy and the search for new forms of politics that respond to new cultural and political formations. If there is a subtle relationship between meaning-making and media consumption in everyday life, how could the subtle become visible and analyzed without falling into authoritative interpretations of global power? Or does this matter? This becomes even more complicated when adding other forms of hegemonic power that intersect and have consequences for people's lives (such as global economy, violence, and the absence of local economic and ecological sustainability) and when constructing a place where performance pedagogies could be explored beyond what was done in this classroom.

Engagement in media performance production also offered an opportunity to work in a space that encouraged self-reflective relationships between media and social life. The production aspect of this project created a locality from which to see the dynamics of global-local power, in relation to how children perceived and lived integrated realities that were difficult to unpack and understand in any linear or essential way. When these integrated realities were understood in relation to echoes of power, it was possible to identify traces of dominant culture but also to identify the ruptures that emerged in reinventing or re-contextualizing media. These newly produced texts within performative inquiry were potential places to "freeze" a moment in time and reconsider multiple possibilities and positionings in that moment (in relation to past-present-future). In the performative inquiry, it was possible to perceive what O'Loughlin described in her book *Embodiment and Education* as the ways "Bodies perform in culturally visible spaces—they are therefore read by others and themselves in ways that are culturally determined" (O'Loughlin, 2006, p. 3). In a time when media, popular culture, technology and the consumption and production of marketed identities are at the core of children's lives, this classroom study points to the potential for reframing the relationship between critical literacy and performative pedagogies at the intersection of how people embody, perform, consume, and produce identities in their everyday lives and how identities are enacted in the dramatic/literacy pedagogical space in classrooms. These perspectives are not disconnected from the number of studies on the role of media literacy in children's lives and work done in classrooms. Among the most relevant to this paper are studies that examine the impact of global and multinational media markets in children's literacy and interpretive practices in relation to interpretation (Mackey, 2003), audience reception (Buckingham, 2003), the dynamics of children's media production discourses, and identities through different tools (such as play and role-play), and their possibilities in classroom pedagogies (Buckingham, 2003; Evans, 2005; Marsh, 2005; Sefton-Green cited in Buckingham, 2003; Wohlwend, 2009). Through, for example, the analysis of the students' produced telenovela *Sin corazón no hay amor*, what became visible in relation to the effectiveness of performative approaches to media and critical literacy was the possibility of participating in the remaking of "doing femininities," in which the emergent performed scripts became ruptures for further considerations in relation to social life and the power of media discourses.

## **Conclusions**

The ability to simply “make visible” representations of media and power discourses in classroom pedagogies has major limitations and makes us wonder what a more complex grassroots media production project based on critical performative pedagogies with young children might look like. It is interesting to think, for example, of those working in performance arts who create rich representations using contradiction and irony as a political stance that opens up questions and new understandings of our relationships with global discourses. As we leave this project, we are still concerned that the reality of multinational market domination has concrete consequences for people’s lives in Puerto Rico and that “playing” with media becomes another form of conservative pedagogy that does not provide solutions to material problems. On this matter, the results of this study only touch the surface of a complex social landscape, but they open up the door to explore new possibilities in which the classrooms are open for participation (although classrooms are never completely “closed”) in examining the everyday politics of globalization. Creating new localities through performance practices begins to make visible people’s relations with global texts and how people actively make sense of and critically reflect on the implications of globalization in everyday life, not as a unified set of practices, but in terms of layers and fractions. These performative spaces help educators move away from an approach to critical literacy as a “state of mind” into critical literacy as a “social practice” (Buckingham, 2003). This may create new ways of reading, interpreting, and producing, as children navigate across local-global social spaces to participate and make meaning.

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