

CRITICAL CONSTRAINTS IN THE CLASSROOM: ASSESSING HOW TEACHERS  
APPROACH MEDIA LITERACY IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Critical Constraints in the Classroom: Assessing How Teachers Approach Media Literacy in Middle and Secondary Schools

Many have advocated critical media literacy as a way to bridge American youth's digital skill set with the demands of citizenship in a country with an uncertain economic and political future. Empowering these students is vital, even as financial and cultural investment in education is dwindling. This thesis addresses the extent to which teachers employ critical strategies to address students' increasingly mediated worlds. By uncovering the narratives of public school English and social studies teachers in middle and secondary schools, the research provides evidence of many constraints that teachers have in implementing critical readings of media and some of the ways that teachers indeed practice critical pedagogy in their interactivity with media in the classroom. Findings suggest that teachers are motivated to discuss media critically in class but may not have some of the impetus to do so based on their prior knowledge.

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This thesis is dedicated to my preternaturally keen nephew, Serigne. No, I'm not saying that because he's my nephew, I'm saying it because along with achieving reading fluency at age four, he deduced at age six, to the astonishment of his elders, what a trapezoidal prism was. (Yeah, we're related).

Recently, I watched a colorful, fast-cutting yogurt commercial with him on the Disney Channel. When I asked him why he thought the commercial was made, he responded, "Maybe to show how healthy the yogurt is."

Serigne, you still have a lot to learn, and when you're a little older, I can only dream that you'll have as passionate, intelligent, and creative teachers as the ones I describe in this really long book. Don't worry about trying to read it just yet, though. They aren't wizardry teachers at Hogwarts or anything like that.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

I want to argue that it is because the media are central to our everyday lives that we must study them. Study them as social and cultural as well as political and economic dimensions of the modern world. Study them in their ubiquity and complexity. Study them as contributors to our variable capacity to make sense of the world, to make and share its meanings.

(Silverstone, 1999, p. 2)

Millenials<sup>1</sup> in America, like Generation X and the TV generation before them, have been criticized for the palpable results of their being constantly entrenched in a technological society. Unlike those in previous generations, however, Millenials are making more choices about when they connect to media. This may be the problem: they are choosing to connect to them more often, at the expense of learning life lessons through more frequent and concentrated engagement in more challenging activities, like employment, physical activity, and schoolwork. Moreover, traditional for-profit media, knowing that they are competing with increased choice among a fragmented audience, campaign more sweepingly.

These trends have been tracked by organizations like the Kaiser Family Foundation, which found that children 8-18 spend, on average, 7 hours a day somehow engaged with a screen (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). The Pew Internet and American Life Project<sup>2</sup> also has a major compendium of data that show the extent of

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of this paper, people born in the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s.

<sup>2</sup> Available: Brenner, J. Teens. Pew Internet & American Life Project, Apr 27, 2012, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/April/Pew-Internet-Teens.aspx>, accessed on May 10, 2011.

youth's growing connectedness in the last decade. Researchers collecting this data often seem surprised that children's deep participation in the screen is growing to the point that there is no “power off” for them. Journalist Tamar Lewin (2010) reported in *The New York Times* that researchers “concluded in 2005 that use could not possibly grow further,” but somehow, their waking hours are filled with electronic gadgetry more and more. Even children under eight are spending as much time with these devices as they are away from them (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

This essentially means that the only time when many children's minds are not embedded in screen life is when they are at school. Some might wonder why, then, should students spend even more time mired in media consumption when they are obligated to learn valuable lessons at the behest of the high taxes Americans pay to support schools.

In this thesis, critical media literacy will be examined as an empowering and challenging pedagogical approach to deal with the forces of media that often might go unacknowledged by students and adults alike. Inasmuch as critical media literacy is a powerful method to break down media into its cultural components, it promotes and requires higher order thinking, collaboration, creativity and civic-mindedness. However, the constraints of the American classroom are not always amenable to this approach, for a variety of reasons that the review of literature indicates and my research participants reveal.

As Turkle (2011) has remarked, “As for online life, [children] see its power... but they also view it as one might the weather: to be taken for granted, enjoyed, and

sometimes endured. They've gotten used to this weather but there are signs of weather fatigue” (p. 172). I offer evidence that teachers are helping their charges to navigate the media, but that their approaches in doing so vary highly. This thesis examines the extent to which teachers believe they can influence the choices that children make with media, and the approaches and objectives they have in media education, given not only the constraints of the core subjects they teach (English Language Arts and Social Studies), but many other factors that direct their workday. More deeply, I wish to uncover how teachers’ own background knowledge and approaches guide how they address media literacy in their classrooms.

Social studies classes address the world (mediated or otherwise) of those beyond students' reach. English Language Arts courses, too, dedicate curricular time to analyzing rhetorical and propagandic techniques that children necessarily encounter every day of their digitally enhanced lives. The evidence of this is in certain objectives in the core curriculum<sup>3</sup> and local or district learning standards; a sampling of these are highlighted in Appendix A. Teachers in these disciplines can best speak to how these core standards are being implemented, and the extent to which they mesh with the objectives of critical media literacy.

Because critical media literacy's heritage derives from both critical theory and cultural studies, much in the literature addresses the range of critical intervention that these scholars perceive as ideal and as currently implemented in schools. In the past and

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<sup>3</sup> The core curriculum in the American context varies, as the various school districts in the country have different expected courses of study and foundations of knowledge which are expected of each student. The Common Core ties standards together nationally, but district-wide standards may include additional expectations.

present, cultural critics have had much to say about Millennials, running the gamut of the searing Frankfurt School tradition (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944; Benjamin, 1936) reducing our relationship with media to a slave industry, or apologists, like Tapscott (2009) or Watkins (2009), who see a collaborative, productive and playful spirit among teenagers interacting in their worlds so unlike Benjamin's tortured Parisian flâneur. Writes Innis (1964), when the media literacy movement hit the United States, it “was understood as a cognitive defense against the most overt and disturbing forms of sensationalism and propaganda pouring out of the rapidly growing culture industries” (p. 3). Though in principle, advocates of critical media literacy are not wedded to effects models of research, they do see a need to educate as a form of protection (Buckingham, 1986; Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel, & Robison, 2009). As Hobbs states (2008): “Advocates of critical literacy use the perspectives of critical and cultural studies as a means to strengthen young people's commitment to radical democratic social transformation” (p. 435).

Modern interest in understanding children’s consumption of media exploded in the 1950s, Goodman claims (2003), when the legal age to work was increased and the latchkey kid came of age, unguarded by both parents who were at work. Parents introduced allowances (heretofore unheard-of for the middle class), thus giving children 12-17 more purchasing power as well as leisure time, “making it possible for young people to buy an identity and participate in the youth culture and consumer market that was just coming into being in the postwar years” (p. 26). All these years later, Goodman adds, corporate America is still finding increasingly aggressive ways to tap this market.

For these more autonomous youth, “computers and mobile devices offer communities when families are absent” (Turkle, 2011, p. 178).

Media scholars have offered evidence that that there is an increased divide between digital natives and digital immigrants (cf. Mehra, Merkel & Bishop, 2004), and that our school system is failing our country's youth. If we are to assume that the classroom is a place to learn habits that affect our lives beyond things chosen do as entertainment or otherwise beyond children’s individual control, we must examine ways to empower the classroom to intercede, and it is unlikely that it can if the digital commitment that digital natives have so resoundingly made is completely circumvented. The U.S. Department of Education's 2010 technology plan includes targeting “21<sup>st</sup> century” skills and competencies, such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and multimedia communication woven into every type of classroom. (Hobbs, 2010). Moreover, it is clear that most school districts are investing a lot in cyber-equipping classrooms (Cuban, 2001), so it is imperative that educators take best advantage of this digital capital, but unpack what this technological presence means.

Some educators, unfortunately, see media as more of a technological tool, and students themselves have shown in studies that they do not understand the purposes behind media in the classroom (Butler, 2010; Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Wyatt & Silva, 2007). Butler's research (2010) showed that, within a New York City school “themed” around media studies, even those students thought that the inclusion of technology in their school meant that they were learning about the media.

Though our government has generously dispensed funds to prop up technology in the classroom, we must staunch the flow of decriticalizing our relationship with media, or the wave Hobbs and Jensen (2009) call “technicism.” One of the gravest threats to our public education system is its corporatization, which has been investigated in several studies (cf. Abji, 2007; Fabos, 2011; Frechette, 2002; Kellner & Share, 2005; Tyner, 1998; Wyatt & Silva, 2007). The threat is very real, and a lack of unity about media literacy’s need might lead to its own demise:

The rush to embrace media literacy may also lead to its suffocating under the weight of its own incoherence. Even the commercial media industry—perhaps sensing that in a period of minimal political interference or regulation, the only real danger to its unrestricted growth and profit maximization is a critically informed public—is moving to initiate its own version (Lewis & Jhally, 1998, p. 117).

Those in the fields of education and media studies must take their cues from students. There can be no doubt that Millennials' participation with digital technology is increasing their literacy in some ways, but educators must strive to ensure that this participation is active, critical, and empowering. The reason I have engaged with this kind of research is twofold: As a researcher, I am interested in reframing media effects through a more critical and cultural lens, and as a professional, I am interested in incorporating media studies to hook and challenge my students.

The main research question that guides my paper is: To what extent do teachers practice critical media literacy in their classrooms? The following section will further elaborate on the concept of critical media literacy, including a history of how it has become a relevant approach and what limits it from being an applicable classroom approach. I delve into the concept of symbolic interactionism to help justify my how my

questions can be answered by a methodological approach that follows in the thesis. My research data are filtered through what the literature has identified as constraints of applying media literacy in middle and secondary classrooms, and also reveal what teachers do to promote critical media literacy. I conclude with the implications of the research, limitations and recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To determine my research questions, I have read text selections from the disciplines of education and pedagogy, communications and media studies, and critical and cultural theory. The organization of this section begins with the history of media literacy, and how critical media literacy developed. I examine critical media literacy's core concepts in connection to its pedagogical and critical legacies, and discuss its studied practices. From there, I will frame critical media literacy in terms of its constraints within U.S. classrooms, foreground the theory that guides my research questions, and appraise the research that has been conducted most similarly to mine.

#### **1. History**

Hobbs and Jensen (2009) go back in history to the fifth century B.C.E. to expose the roots of media literacy, when the practice of political oratory was born: then began the analysis of rhetoric intended for the masses. The tradition of *critical* media literacy can be traced to traditions in cultural and critical studies. In particular, the theoretical works of Walter Benjamin (1936) as well as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947) have inspired various ways of viewing mass-reproducible art and the culture that consumes it, respectively. Neither Benjamin's lamentations of the lost "aura" of original artwork, nor Adorno and Horkheimer's foundational work in critical theory which inspired scores of postmodern cultural critics, was enough to prevent a flood of technical

innovations (chiefly for purposes of entertainment) from infiltrating the lives of affluent post-war societies in the West. At this point, public education in America had reached critical mass, but school was not necessarily the place to discuss what information children were consuming from the movies, radio, television, record players, and so on.

Arising alongside the fruits of Industrial Age and the birth of electronics were some fundamental revelations in modern education:

When John Dewey explained that learners' lived experiences and concerns about their own day-to-day environment are at the root of the meaning-making process, he was writing at a time when children of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were beginning to make their first regular visits to the nickelodeon theaters of the big cities, where Thomas Edison and his associates were beginning to create and distribute a wide variety of narrative and non-fiction films (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 2).

As new technology appeared in the classroom, so rose the idea of media literacy (Fabos, 2011). For example, Hobbs and Jensen (2009) cite a teacher's learning outcomes from 1922: “[To] give practice in English composition, to develop standards by which to judge motion pictures,' and to promote 'appreciation for the technique of the motion picture as contrasted from the play and the story’” (p. 2). In the postwar period, educators saw a need to introduce the concepts of propaganda, public opinion, and advertisements (Hobbs, 2007).

In the 1960s, a fledgling media studies school was forming (Fabos, 2011). This was the time that Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman rose as public intellectuals in the educational bailiwick (Hobbs, 2007). Their work was marked by strong encouragement to inoculate youngsters against media effects (McLuhan 1964; Postman, 1961). By the seventies and eighties, however, educators were beginning to welcome new media in the classroom for actual inquiry and analysis (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

Buckingham (1998) states that in England, “The notion of media education as a form of ideological inoculation or demystification... has increasingly been challenged, both in the light of new developments in academic research, and in the light of classroom experience” (p. 37). In other words, not only had researchers wiped the slate clean of a hypodermic needle model in which students internalize all of media’s messages without second thought (Katz, 1957), but teachers were also finding it integral to incorporate media in the classroom.

Research has also shown that there has historically been a partisan struggle about reasons to use education to intervene in children's participation in media. The discourse on the right tends to view media in terms of their amorality, while those on the left say the media promote consumerism and blame them for the rise of Neoliberalism (Buckingham, 1986). The fear is more conspicuous among privileged members in society, who seem to have less to worry about than those in lower socioeconomic brackets (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Various institutions have played a vital role in shaping the status of media in the classroom. After McLuhan's idea of integrating media analysis into secondary schools started to blossom, some groups have tried to slow this down. Kubey reported (1998) that politicians, like Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire, played a huge part. Proxmire heard tell of government grants on critical viewing, and in 1979, awarded Boston University with a golden fleece award for wasting \$400,000 dollars of taxpayers' money for syllabi that taught students how to watch television. Within two years, under the Reagan

Administration, the grants were rescinded, and since then, critical viewing has been relative anathema for educational grant institutions.

However, many opportunities for those in the corporate sector sprang up, as surfaced in the introduction. Their curricular materials, prepared by marketers, are welcomed by cash-strapped school districts (Abji, 2007). Tyner's striking analysis (1998) revealed that

Media industries seem to be most interested in producing critical viewing kits and other materials during times of the highest public outrage over media content and the resultant veiled media education resources generated by media industry sources serve as a panacea to vocal critics of commercialism, sex, and violence in media. They are an intelligent marketing response to criticism about media content—one that offers a comfortable middle ground and positions the industry as a responsible corporate citizen (p. 124).

Predictably, marketing departments are much more strategic and aggressive than teachers in reaching young media consumers.

Nonprofit organizations also play their part. In the 1990s, the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) was founded as less expensive media technology found its way into lesson plans, and another, more politically-anchored teacher's organization (differentiated by its refusal to accept corporate sponsorship) came about in 2002: Action Coalition for Media Education<sup>4</sup> (ACME) (Fabos, 2011). Sut Jhally founded the Media Education Foundation in 1992 to produce educational films grounded in critical media literacy. All organizations work as umbrella groups for more regional or smaller nonprofit groups that consider the concerns of media in the classroom.

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<sup>4</sup> Though the “buzzword” angling through this paper is *critical media literacy*, uses of the term “media education” in the literature are similarly more critically charged than others, and in my paper *media education* should not be viewed with the relative neutrality of say, “media studies” or “media literacy.” The ideological split between NAMLE and ACME are connotative of my intended use of media education throughout the manuscript.

“While many media educators are members of [multiple] organizations, personal differences between some of the leaders have hindered collaborations. Media education in the USA is having more success on more limited levels by hardworking individuals and small organizations” (Kellner & Share, 2005). Many of the media literacy initiatives from abroad are grounded in work by teachers, but in the U.S., initiatives have been less grassroots. Some outsiders have contributed to planning media education curricula, such as the National Drug Control Policy and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, parishes of the Catholic Church, lobby organizations and medical practitioners (Goodman, 2003). Tyner (1998) criticizes this infiltration: “Top down calls for media education from those outside the educational bureaucracy had the adverse effect of slowing down the consensus necessary to deeply integrate media literacy education across the curriculum and then, to investigate its efficacy in small, incremental ways.” (p. 123).

Certainly, as culture (and curricular standards) are beginning to account more and more for media literacy in the classroom, data, publicity, infrastructure and productive relationships have improved, but it is in unlikely proportion to how much children's screen time has vastly increased since the early nineties (Aufderheide, 1993).

What does the future hold for our classrooms? According to Seymour Papert in 1984,

There won't be schools in the future... I think the computer will blow up the school. This is, the school defined as something where there are class, teachers running exams, people structured in groups by age, following a curriculum—all of that. The whole system is based on a set of structural concepts that are incompatible with the presence of the computer... But this will happen only in

communities of children who have access to computers on a sufficient scale (as cited in Cuban, 1986).

Prensky's research (2009, 2001a, 2001b) centers on the premise that students' brains are actually functioning differently from those in different generations, thanks to such frequent interfacing with screens. He suggests that we completely rewire the classroom just as students have been rewired.

Others aren't so iconoclastic in their beliefs about a total dissolution of the school as we know it, but do see that our culture and our systems of learning are changing drastically. Jenkins, et al. (2009) speak of a participatory culture in which "the new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking" (p. 29). It seems as if a somewhat more cybernetic specter of Dewey will follow us into 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

## **2. Critical Media Literacy in Principle**

Silverstone (1999) defines media literacy as requiring no more and no less than other forms of literacy: "a capacity to decipher, appreciate, criticize and compose" (p. 37). Critical media literacy in particular can be taken as an approach that synthesizes the work of critical pedagogues in the 1960s and 1970s, cultural studies proponents, and current scholars in new literacies and pedagogies, to help students wrestle with the

instrumental role of media in their lives as consumers and citizens. Many terms in the literature have been identified as being related to media literacy.<sup>5</sup>

Hobbs (2007) claims that the term ‘critical’ “refers to the recognition of oppression and exploitation as embedded in texts and textual activity” (p. 132). If there was anyone who applied the spirit of critical theory to the process of education, it was Paulo Freire. He conceived of traditional schooling (1970) as a “banking process,” in which concepts were deposited into students’ brains with no regard to their consciousness and experience of the world (p. 66). In order to truly educate, a teacher must guide students in dialogue.

...[True] dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking--thinking which discerns and indivisible solidarity between the world and men and admits of no dichotomy between them--thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity--thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (pp. 80-81).

Dialogue, in Freire’s sense (2005), is somewhat analogous to the dialectic in critical theory:

One that does not dichotomize between commonsense knowledge and the other more systematic, more precise knowledge, but rather seeks a synthesis of opposites, the act of studying always implies that of reading, even if it is not reduced to it. Reading of the word enables us to read a previous reading of the world (p. 34).

This dialogue, Freire elaborates, does not arrive completely by way of experience.

Literacy is crucial to reading the world, because experience for individuals can be very

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<sup>5</sup> Hobbs (2010) has identified some from the research literature: information literacy, media literacy, media education, visual literacy, news literacy, health media literacy, and digital literacy (perhaps among others).

narrow. “Reading the word” makes the world bigger and more relevant to pedagogues and students alike.

Encompassing more than just texts, our word/world, in this day and age, comes to us aurally, visually, and digitally. Others in Freire’s tradition have spoke of increasing social efficacy or student-centeredness (White & Walker, 2008), a language of possibility (Giroux, cited in Simon, 1992), or a pedagogy of possibility (Simon, 1992), which must include the “facility to interrogate both social forms and their possible transformations as to their compatibility with three additional basic principles: [1] securing human diversity, [2] securing compassionate justice, and [3] securing the renewal of life.” (p. 21).

Because Freire was mainly concerned with the education of the poor, he has often inspired teachers in inner-city schools. Explains Butler (2010), who tried to apply a media education program in an under-served school in New York City, “The institution of school divides youth of privilege from underprivileged youth early in age and perpetuates those divisions throughout the tenure of schooling. Critical pedagogy works to make explicit those boundaries and to explore alternate ways to construct education” (p. 7). Goodman's work in after-school programs (2003) corroborates Butler's experiences, noting that drill and practice dictated by teachers cements an “us versus them” mentality. Acknowledging the influence of the Frankfurt School in critiquing media culture as reproducing forms of domination, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) stress the need for reclamation, especially for the youth who only encounter culture in a mass-mediated form.

The Freirean creed of centering on critical thinking is probably the most adaptive to the majority of U.S. classrooms. Few teachers of the humanities would argue with Simon's proposal (1992): "Thus a pedagogy of possibility might be thought of as a counterdiscursive activity that attempts to provoke a process through which people might engage in a transformative critique of their everyday lives" (p. 83).<sup>6</sup> Teachers examine literature (both fiction and nonfiction) as well as explore historical, political and economic contexts to connect students with their worlds. Contemporary middle and secondary teachers thrive on dialogue, personal stories, controversy, and picking apart the public sphere with their students.

A component of critical pedagogy that might seem a little bit more uncomfortable to teachers is Freire's belief in classrooms as centers for political action (1998): "I do not see why I should omit or hide my political stance by proclaiming a neutral position that does not exist. On the contrary, my role as a teacher is to assent the students' right to compare, to choose, to rupture, to decide" (p. 68). As Benjamin might say, we need to view our situations not as 'the given present,' but rather from 'the present as revolutionary possibility.' (as cited in Simon, 1992, p. 30). "Apolitical" media literacy's "avoidance of thorny political territory sidesteps widespread citizen concerns and misses an opportunity to demonstrate the valence and necessity of not merely understanding the world, but of changing it" (Lewis & Jhally, 1998, p. 110). Thorny precepts aside, English teachers who applied a yearlong curriculum of media literacy were often uncomfortable about how they essentially became *civics* teachers (Hobbs, 2007).

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<sup>6</sup> Though I am sure many English teachers would implore Simon to read Orwell's "Politics and the English Language."

Ultimately, the idealism of critical pedagogy comes into conflict with the way our schools are run. Remarks Tyner (1998), “Most schools... [bear] a closer resemblance to minimum security prisons” than democratic arenas for learning (p. 162). When critical pedagogy translates to the fringe topic of media studies, empowerment cannot be achieved, thanks to standardized tests (Simon, 1992) and regimented class time constraints (Frechette, 2002), among many others to be detailed in my section on constraints. But first, I will go into some detail about what intellectual traditions critical media literacy advocates cull from.

The theories of media that are most commonly accessed in our classrooms, some argue, derive from outdated studies that disempower our critical faculties of filtering out media's messages, such as the two-step flow model (Katz, 1957), and cultivation theory (described in Hobbs, 2007). At the other end of the spectrum lie minimal effects models (described in Tyner, 1998) and uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). For the latter, the Idaho Department of Education offered, “Children are capable of making market decisions to meet their [media] needs. Their criteria may not agree with ours but are usually justified” (cited in Aufderheide, 1993, p. 17).

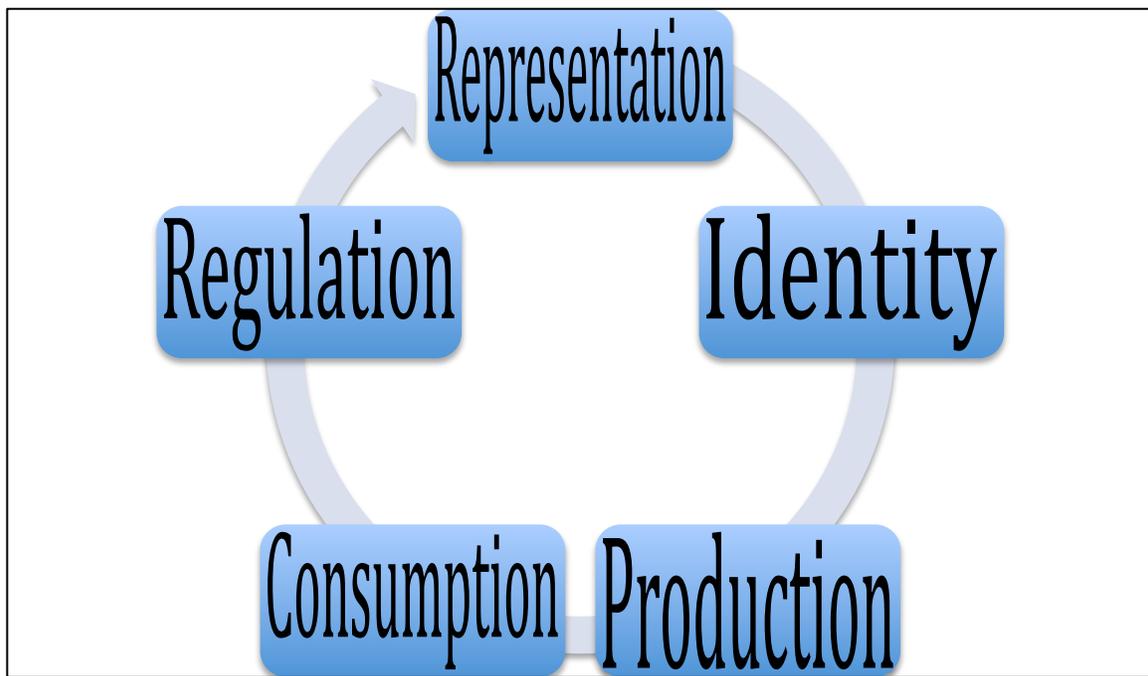
Those in the tradition that brought about critical media literacy would be loath to agree with post-positivist approaches such as those. Buckingham (1990) problematizes the academic theories of media and the elitism and heavy effects ideas they have espoused, particularly the earlier studies. When media educators have listened to some of those researchers' media nay-saying, their response has been to adopt a discrimination model, avoiding content that is controversial or perceived as low-quality. In this model,

Aufderheide (1993) states that teachers believe “preferred” media content is better for students to experience in a classroom because students need not question them on their face.

Finally, other critics of communications studies as such point out the validity of their measurements—because everyone's environment is so deeply mediated in so many different ways, a true “control” group does not exist to study broad effects on the “audience” of media (Butler, 2010; Hobbs, 2007). This is not to say that experimental research hasn't made a positive impact on curricula; it is in great part from these methods that the classroom is a more hospitable place for educational media.

A lot has changed since the irascible critiques of the Frankfurt School, but current scholars in more constructivist and postmodern strands of media studies maintain that media have an overarching presence in our understandings of the world. Wyatt and Silva (2007) apply the communicative action theory of a contemporary proponent of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, who articulated in the 1970s the need for dialogue and 'speech acts' to defend against a world increasingly mediated by bureaucratic 'systems,' so that students may interact within the 'public sphere.' Lewis and Jhally (1998) operate in the tradition of political economy, which also finds its roots in Postmarxist thought of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and focuses entirely on the interactions between the people who produce and the structures that dictate this production, and in the case of media, how subtle yet rapacious this depredation of the superstructure can be for the uncritical masses.

Most common in the literature of critical strands of media education in the last thirty years, corresponding with media education's own nascence, is the Cultural Studies School. It arrived on the academic scene in the mid 1960s in England, perhaps a little bit removed from the more ruthlessly pessimistic and radical scholars on the European continent. Its influence is understandably more manifest in Anglo-speaking countries. One of the principal concepts that drove cultural studies was 'the circuit of culture' (see Figure 1). Detailed by Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997), it diagrams the interaction of the institutional sources and social sources that induces the meaning of culture in the discourse.



**Figure 1:** Circuit of Culture<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman*. London: Sage.

Perhaps the intellectual world had grown exhausted by critical theory's anti-establishment vigor, for the less strictly centralized paradigm of cultural studies brought with it the justification for studying the discourses of artistic escape, such as soap operas, romance novels, motorcycle clubs, and rock music (Macey, 2000). As best practices in education have shown that accessing students' prior knowledge is the way to tug them into lessons, cultural studies becomes a natural choice for social critique in the legitimacy it offers critical reflection about the media we enjoy. Scharrer (2007) states that media effects theories focus on the negative and merely ask students to be critical of media patterns, whereas cultural studies shows that the effects of media are not entirely negative, and avoids oversimplification. And in contrast to the tradition of critical theory, cultural studies would not buy into the idea that media are so hegemonic that other factors in people's upbringing (family, teachers and peers) are negated (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). While proponents of cultural studies advise against elitism and moralizing, they inevitably make social and political judgments when they discuss media (Davies & Merchant, 2007; Scharrer, 2007).

One aspect of cultural studies that media educators often focus on is reception theory (Duncan, 2007), and how different audiences "read" characterizations in non-book media. Institutional media can often alienate child viewers because of their assumptions of the ideal reader (Buckingham, 1986). Texts are assumed to have preferred readings inscribed by a dominant code; negotiated readings come when the audience member accepts the messages but modify them according to his or her experiences (Hall, 1974). However, according to Swanson (1991), given the wide diversity of experience among

American schoolchildren, teachers must assume there will be oppositional readings on the other end of the spectrum of the idealized reader. Swanson also asserts that representations have no indestructible or final meaning, and can encode polysemically, either through intertext or through various modes of relaying a message (multimedia), meaning that student audiences can select and internalize the more meaningful messages within a text's polysemy, just as students may learn in different ways as their teacher accesses multiple intelligences. Ultimately, the audience of media messages is not amorphous and it is not an empty vessel (Branson, 1991; Buckingham, 1986). People's openness and reception to media are, in a word, mediated.

As for the literacy component of 'critical media literacy,' Kellner and Share (2005) are barely willing to differentiate literacy and education, for to be educated means to become literate: "Literacy, in our conception, comprises gaining competencies involved in effectively learning and using socially constructed forms of communication and representation" (p. 369) The need for (traditional) print literacy is stronger than ever, according to pedagogical advocates of media literacy (Goodman, 2003; Jenkins, et al. 2009; Kellner & Share, 2005). Many others (Cuban, 2001; Hobbs, 2010; Prensky, 2009; Tyner, 1998) are interested in the multimodal symbiotic shifts as new media technologies arise, and how those tools affect what it means to be literate.

Historically, being literate has not always been the prerogative of the learner, as Raymond Williams discussed with early industrial workers who could read but not write—follow orders, not express themselves (as cited in Lewis & Jhally, 1998). Tyner (1998) also aligns the history of literacy with the intellectual impetus of the time: before

the 19<sup>th</sup> century, learning to read was mostly for religious practice, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it designated the aristocracy. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, finally, it served social purposes for government, nationalism, unification and the needs of the working class. She concludes:

Despite a shift in academia toward more complex and sophisticated viewpoints about literacy, the public's image of literacy still belongs in the little red schoolhouse of long ago, To the average citizen, the purposes of literacy are practical and applied: to get a good job, vote in an informed way, and understand the labels on consumer products. (pp. 32-33).

Ultimately, neophytes to the field of literacy must know that this paradigm has been displaced not just by technologies, but on a holistic “sociocultural perspective” of reading and writing—in literacy's political, economic and historical situation (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p.1).

### **3. Critical Media Literacy in Practice**

Lewis (2007) emphasizes that it is the skills, not the tools that require our primary focus as educators:

New technologies afford new practices, but it is the practices themselves, and the local and global contexts within which they are situated, that are central to new literacies. The logical implication... is that schools would accomplish more if, like new literacy users, they too focused on practices rather than tools (p. 230).

Still, the major “new literacy” getting tackled in schools is computer literacy. This all despite some reservation that educational computer use does not improve student gains, is not developed with literacy or curricular experts, does not appear equally in underserved schools, does not get put to proper use by teachers or students, nor does it allow for diverse production methods, or steer students creatively (Cuban, 1986; Cuban, 2001; Frechette, 2002; Tyner, 1998). Teachers, whether they like it or not, must use technology

in their classrooms to meet perceived social and workforce demands of computer literacy (Kinzer & Leander, 2007), even if research outcomes are unknown or contested.

Though computer classes have become more and more common, all students in public schools nowadays, regardless of regular school computer access, are exposed to information literacy as students of English and Social Studies. It is federally mandated that teachers enable students to evaluate print and non-print sources as part of their humanities- or social sciences-based curriculum. Kinzer & Leander (2007) articulate that teachers are interested in engaging students with web-based sources and their credibility and purpose, adding that curricula to determine reliability of sources should be developed due to the size, growth and impermanent nature of the web.

The future of literacy is uncertain, and literacy historians are none too willing to make predictions (Tyner, 1998). As vast as the field is, the concept of multiple literacies is very young, and there is little consensus about how literacy links to our ever-changing sociopolitical climate or will accompany media education. In the educational community, there is need for new and traditional literacies, but there are logistical concerns. Meyrowitz (1998) points out that there are special constraints of staff, time and resources to teach both reading and nonreading literacy.

No matter what theories those in the field of education espouse regarding critical pedagogies and new media literacies, all can agree that media are “not neutral,” even if pedagogues perhaps should be. Lack of consensus is not new to any field, nor must it necessarily be a complete detriment to media literacy's growth and discourse.

Critical media literacy does not always stand so definitively apart from literature that does not commit theories of cultural studies or critical pedagogy. More mainstream definitions of critical media literacy in the U.S. include Aufderheide's (1993), which was presented to the Aspen Institute and is often considered authoritative in education studies of media literacy in the U.S.:

Media literacy, the movement to expand notions of literacy to include the powerful post-print media that dominate our informational landscape, helps people understand, produce and negotiate meanings in a culture made up of powerful images, words and sounds (p. 1).

The report is couched in rhetorical neutrality and emphasizes the heavy effects of media, but reveals a salient notion of active educational interaction.

According to Scheibe (2004), best practices for media literacy dialogue ask the following questions of students: “[1] Who made—and who sponsored—this message, and what is their purpose? [2] Who is the target audience and how is the message specifically tailored to that audience? [3] What are the different techniques used to inform, persuade, entertain, and attract attention? [4] What messages are communicated (and/or implied) about certain people, places, events, behaviors, lifestyles, and so forth? [5] How current, accurate, and credible is the information in this message? [6] What is left out of this message that might be important to know?” (p. 63). In addition to devising critical questions, Tyner (1998) writes that active media educators in the United States attempt, with little institutional success, to incorporate both the reading (media education) and writing (media production) aspects to curriculum. In Scharrer's experiments (2005, 2006), outcomes have been positive, *provided* the goal is not necessarily sociopolitical transformation, not that this goal ever appears in any core curricula: “If participation in

media education allows individuals to learn something new or something more about media practices, processes, institutions, or influence, that is an important cognitive outcome” (Scharrer, 2007, p. 24).

The British, who have been relatively successful at implementing curriculum and dealing with their identities as critical media pedagogues, best summarize the use of critical media literacy. Assorted research demonstrates that Masterman (1985) offers the foundational terms of teaching critical media literacy (cf. Aufderheide, 1993; Kellner & Share, 2005; Lusted, 1991; Wyatt & Silva, 2007). After establishing the assumption that media are constructions, Masterman urges media educators to investigate: [1] “the sources, origins and determinants of media constructions,” [2] “the dominant techniques and codings employed by the media to convince us of the truth of their representations,” [3] “the nature of the ‘reality’ constructed by the media; the values implicit in media representations,” and [4] “the ways in which media constructions are read or received by their audiences” (Masterman, 1985, p. 21). Appendix B offers some adapted versions of the goals of critical/cultural-based media education in the UK and in the U.S. These concepts exist somewhat in tandem with du Gay et al.'s circuit of culture (1997). The concepts ring similar to the aforementioned questions asked by Scheibe (2004). It is evident that critical pedagogy is a strong backdrop of critical media literacy elements, whether made explicit or not (Duncan, 2007). It just so happens that the socioeconomic and linguistic priorities attempt to break from the elitism of “authorized interpretations of canonical text” carried on so fruitfully in our public school system (Black, 2007, p. 134).

The curricular goals of critical media literacy are manifested in various ways. The primary goals are as follows: to locate media in a broad set of social realities which account for a multicultural existence (Lewis & Jhally, 1998), to keep a spectral eye on media and protection instead of viewing their goals in black and white (Hobbs, 2010), to alert students to media sources outside of the mainstream (Frechette, 2002), and to promote what Masterman called “critical autonomy,” or thinking for oneself (as cited in Tyner, 1998). By and large, critical media literacy advocates expect production to be a part of becoming “literate,” though some sticklers are concerned about students merely reproducing examples of consumer culture (Buckingham, 1998; Frechette, 2002; Hobbs, 2007; Jenkins, et al. 2009; Kellner & Share, 2007). The hope is that students frame their interactions with media with suspicion towards their producers. Koltay (2011) acknowledges, “Content creation is easier than ever, because the same technology can easily be used to send and receive, thus many are already content producers” (p. 218). Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) corroborate that “[a] curriculum in popular culture studies would be required to include at its center video and music production and performance” (p. 183).

One voice in the literature has theorized that these types of explorations in critical media literacy should indeed be assessed in accordance with the dominant paradigms of education, if only to provide a rationale for its curricular development, by comparing thoughts and opinions before or after their participation in a critical media literacy “treatment,” using close-ended items on a questionnaire (Scharrer, 2007). Here, though, many critical pedagogues and media theorists in the critical-cultural tradition might

quibble with the idea that there could be a “control group” of students in a media-saturated society, and the results of close-ended questionnaires or experiments would not be completely valid in measuring critical thinking skills.

And what should students primarily be grasping to become critically literate? Primarily the systems of corporate and other hegemonic predation. This should include “an examination of the Western media for the way relationships between the [global, not antebellum] North and... South are defined, and for the positions of dominance and oppression that may be reinforced through them” (Duncan, 2007, p. 99). Though new classroom technology creates unprecedented opportunities to desegregate a vast global community, only critical media pedagogy can help students comprehend the different contexts in which these classroom outsiders maneuver their lives (Jenkins, et al. 2009).

Ultimately, however, the biggest target of critical media literacy is consumerism. Tyma (2009) states:

Aligning critical pedagogy with media literacy is not a difficult articulation... [because profit] acts as a primary motivator, directing media toward 'texts' that will produce the largest return on investment, with all other considerations secondary. It is the understanding of these motivations and texts... that is at the heart of media literacy” (p. 892).

Lewis & Jhally (1998) assert simply: “Media literacy should be about helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers” (p. 109). Common media targets are the agents behind advertising and journalism. Students can learn to make a determination of (relatively) credible information, but should also identify the perspective and motive of the producer (Jenkins, et al. 2009). As Torres and Mercado (2007) show, our regulatory body for broadcasting, the Federal Communications

Commission, is not doing very much to stem the conglomeration of vast media companies who work more and more for profit and less in the public interest. Advertisers, critical theorists unsurprisingly believe, are the most insidious media force. While media try to at least connect with the public sphere, advertisers have commercialized this sphere so wholly, and have actually propped up political and corporate forces over the average citizen (Wyatt & Silva, 2007). Moreover, Frechette (2002) emphasizes that educators should focus on corporate and near monopolistic ownership of the media. As Fabos (2011) notes, it becomes more and more necessary for us to resist this influence through the critique of media consolidation and democratic creation of content.

What are some teachable strategies that can hook students into critical media literacy? Directly related to the act of criticizing corporate strangleholds of media is the very incremental but often amusing act of culture-jamming, which imitates the situationist concept of *détournement* (Debord, 1994); the act basically amounts to hoisting corporations' discourse (often brands) on their own petards. (See Figure 2). Tyner (1998) says that culture-jammers have already “turned their most withering scorn on those who control the technologies of communication—multinational media conglomerates” (p. 150). Going back further than Debord and the 68ers, Tyner asserts the tradition of culture jamming originated with the Luddites.<sup>8</sup> The oft-maligned Luddites (Cuban, 1986), weren't merely anti-technology. They raged against their looming machines most after they realized how easily they would stop productively functioning to

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<sup>8</sup> I would argue that it probably goes back further to Iconoclasts in the Dark Ages.

get work done<sup>9</sup>; perhaps more magnanimously, the Luddites destroyed machines that were clearly tailored for pint-sized laborers. “Just as the Luddites sabotaged technology, culture-jammers subvert mass media's intended messages—especially those targeted to children” (Tyner, 1998, p. 151). These parallels reveal the actualization of critical media literacy's protectionist (but not inoculationist) stance, which I will address later.



**Figure 2:** Example of Culture-jamming<sup>10</sup>

Along with the engaging approach of culture-jamming, there are several examples in the literature of specific lessons that teach youth how to critique the circuit of media

<sup>9</sup> In the present, we call this planned obsolescence.

<sup>10</sup> Matt Mechtley, “Burgers built with what you love.” January 18, 2008 via Flickr, Creative Commons Attribution.

culture, including the figurative and actual “deconstruction” of the American Flag (Kemmitt, 2007), a series of questions to ask about representation in visual media, both aesthetic and oppositional (Swanson, 1991), a dialectic conversation about students’ preferred viewing habits in comparison to other forms of textual consumption (Branston, 1991), and a case study on Rupert Murdoch's news agenda (Wollen, 1991), among others. Above all, Buckingham (1998) underscores, is to have a flexible conceptual curriculum instead of a canonical set of media texts: “In this respect, it enables media education to remain contemporary and responsive to students' changing interests and experiences, without becoming merely arbitrary in its selection of material” (pp. 39-40).

This centering on students' interests and realities, central to Freire's pedagogy, is a hallmark in critical media literacy (Kubey, 1998). As Simon (1992) puts it, progressive pedagogues do not try to force their own value systems on their students. Though adopting “popular culture and fan fiction wholesale” would diminish their popularity with students (Black, 2007, pp. 134-135), teachers need to “understand more about what our students already know before we start trying to teach them what we think they ought to know” in classrooms (Buckingham, 1986, p. 30). This concept of accessing prior knowledge is vital to American teachers. Unfortunately, doing so is limited in the classroom to the extent that U.S. children take high-stakes standardized tests that are not intertextual and multimodal in format (Hagood, Alvermann & Heron-Hruby, 2010), thus accessing this prior knowledge can be a moot dedication of curricular time.

Popular media constitute great bridge material to the more standardized expectations of testing (Kemmitt, 2007), but critical media literacy proponents would go further:

...The development of media education is part of wider move towards democratization, a process whereby students' out-of-school cultures are gradually recognized as valid and worthy of consideration in the school curriculum. ... Such strategies place a central emphasis on the (problematic) concept of relevance and on the attempt to validate students' cultures (Buckingham, 1998, p. 35).

This democratization is antithetical to the testing culture that proliferates in the United States. Those teachers who do espouse a belief in strong media effects must still embrace the exchange of information in a classroom, "rather than a unidirectional delivery by the media educators. By pointing out examples of media portrayals and practices that are more or less 'guilty of the criticisms raised, we can limit sweeping moral statements about the 'evils' of all media" (Buckingham, 2000, as cited in Scharrer, 2007). Moreover, we should recognize that students *already* engage in media criticism and that teachers are not omniscient about the media.

Engaging in critical dialogue should not only be for the benefit of students as individuals. Jenkins, et al. (2009) indicate that the classroom is a breeding ground for individualistic labor, quite unlike the collaborative, team-oriented labor market that exists. Though Jenkins' work on media education does not fall squarely in the tradition of critical media literacy, his visions of how we educate children for our future strongly urge dialogic thinking for student empowerment. He calls our social future participatory culture, a much more digitized version of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community," a term used to describe the community and nation-building character of printed mass media

(as cited in Silverstone, 1999, p. 98). Participatory culture is certainly mediated by our digital “prostheses” but stands in stark contrast with Putnam's indictment (2000) of alienated American communities in *Bowling Alone*. Jenkins asserts that school administrations need to be prepared to intervene in the child's new hypermediated worlds by focusing lessons on ethics, along with being more transparent and trying to narrow the participation gap between genders, ethnicities and classes.

To be sure, research in critical media literacy has aligned with these futures, and come up with strategies to incorporate digital lessons intertwined with critical pedagogy, setting up hypermedia platforms which students access and contribute to (Davis & Merchant, 2007; Fabos, 2011; Hammett, 2004; Jenkins, et al. 2009). This strategy is also more inclusive for students who tend to withdraw from verbalization in the classroom. In considering the dissonance of public schools’ tendency to hold fast to its traditions, Jenkins (2009) resolves that schools should teach students to have a broad set of knowledge but how to also acknowledge the social expertise that can often be accessed from “traditional gatekeepers and others of which must be cross-checked and vetted within a collective intelligence” (p. 77).

Some studies have shown success in implementing critical media literacy in the classroom, such as Hobbs' yearlong study (2007) of a “treatment group” of English students who participated in a year of media education instead of the “control group” who committed to the regular year of English Class. Hobbs reported many improvements in students' English abilities after this year in comparison to the control group: [1] improved spelling, [2] more sophisticated vocabulary, [3] more active discussions, [4] finding main

idea in visual text, and [5] making effective comparisons. Even though the class was offered for English students, Hobbs remarked on how students “possessed some of the intellectual and critical abilities that are components of political maturity” by discussing media’s role in the discourse: “They benefited from opportunities to ‘read the word and the world’ through systematic opportunities for learning that connected literacy to life” (p. 112). Scharrer's (2006, 2007) experimental groups showed similar results, as did Hobbs' earlier work (Frost & Hobbs, 1998).

Schools have already started integrating media studies into curriculum, to an extent. Some common ways they are integrated are by engaging with “erroneous beliefs” the media promote, assessing credibility and bias, and comparing different ways media convey topics (Scheibe, 2004). Integration into social studies and English is “relatively easy” (Butler, 2010, p. 187), but as an elective, critical media literacy would not be taken seriously or get adequate funding. The introduction of media studies “should be a paradigm shift that, like multiculturalism or globalization, reshapes how we teach every existing subject” (Jenkins, et al. 2009, p. 109). More than curriculum, though, media literacy should be brought to teachers' attention as a pedagogical approach, so that they can multitask according to the curriculum that they frankly cannot control (Scheibe, 2004).

Though more and more, mandated curricula are beginning to factor in standards that deal with media interpretation and evaluation, media education exists on the margins. Certainly critical media literacy's intellectual antecedents would find the prescription of a stable center laughable, but some of the resistance has to come from within the existing

framework. Kellner & Share (2007) state that most practitioners of critical media literacy do so in isolation. Most educators, however, thrive on collaborating on lesson ideas. Barring these collegial interactions, there is no real “canon” of selectable media texts that are often offered in teacher training or professional development (Kennedy, 2005). Teachers can get ideas from colleagues about texts that have met with some success, but because of media's vast but often unpredictable presence day to day, it can be hard to catch up with the currency that might provide teachable moments for students. Still, the tendency towards ideal readers and preferred readings very much thrive, especially in English Language Arts settings (Tilly, 1991). Sometimes, schools are provided with materials, but White and Walker (2008) are suspicious of these infiltrations, known as Sponsored educational materials (SEMs): “Companies offer teachers free resources such as maps, videos, software, workbooks, posters, and so on. The catch is that all the materials contain advertisements for their sponsors” (p. 20). Critical media literacy practitioners might be more vigilant about creating their own materials, but the sponsored approach affords teachers plenty of convenience that critical media literacy cannot.

Even when attempting to synthesize more “top-down” approaches, Tyner (1998) reports, beginning at the Aspen Institute's media literacy meeting in 1992 and with the professional organizations NAMLE and ACME, the movement has little grassroots support. This is in contrast to strong media education programmes in other countries, such as the UK, Israel, New Zealand and European countries. This is perhaps because not many in those countries have to travel more than a few hours to get to a central meeting

space in their respective nations. Teachers in the U.S. don't have this luxury, what with their home country being spread across 3.5 million square miles (Kubey, 1998).

In fact, where the United States has failed in the last thirty years or so, Europe, particularly has soared in terms of implementing media studies education (Goodman, 2003; Kellner & Share, 2005). As the Birmingham Center for Culture Studies was based in the UK, it is unsurprising that media education developed as a legitimate subject.<sup>11</sup> In addition, converse to McLuhan's metaphorical nudge towards ignorant fish<sup>12</sup>, students abroad can more easily identify and evaluate U.S.'s media presence precisely because it is so different from their home cultures. "In [English Speaking countries worldwide], the tidal wave of U.S. media provokes a vivid affront to the local cultures that receive them and has served as a stimuli for the teaching of media since at least the 1960s" (Tyner, 1998, p. 130).

#### **4. Constraints on Critical Media Literacy**

Critical media literacy has never been a central strategy of core curricula in the United States. Even as technology grows in our classrooms, our methods of measuring its effectiveness there fall short. In some cases, as in after-school programs dedicated to developing media and technological literacy, we have the chance to see the benefits of instilling critical-thinking skills with fewer intervening variables of teaching outcomes

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<sup>11</sup> British students can pursue the A Levels (their version of a high school diploma assuring them university entry) in Media Studies: Assessment and Qualifications Alliance. (2012). *A-level Media Studies*. Guildford: Author. Retrieved May 3, 2012, from <http://www.aqa.org.uk/qualifications/a-level/media-studies.php>

<sup>12</sup> "One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in" (McLuhan & Fiore, 2001).

(Goodman, 2003), but stakeholders complain that the beneficiaries of grant-supported programs have not tangibly described any positive outcomes. Hobbs (2008) wrote:

As with the various approaches to new literacies in the context of school-based programs, the primary challenge of youth media programs relates to our still-limited understanding of the benefits of these programs in the lives of children and youth. As a result of its confusing theory base, which includes elements from developmental psychology, social work, and education, some have claimed that the lack of research has limited the momentum in the field (p. 438).

This is worrisome for the future of media studies in the curriculum—a lack of hard numbers, which is all but indispensable to educational research. I have located numerous other perceived impediments to critical media literacy that have guided my research.

These include:

- A lack of desire or need for critical reflection
- A bias against media
- A lack of consensus among critical media literacy practitioners
- Time and space
- Standardized testing
- Teacher autonomy
- Teacher education

#### 4.1. *Lack of Desire or Need for Critical Reflection*

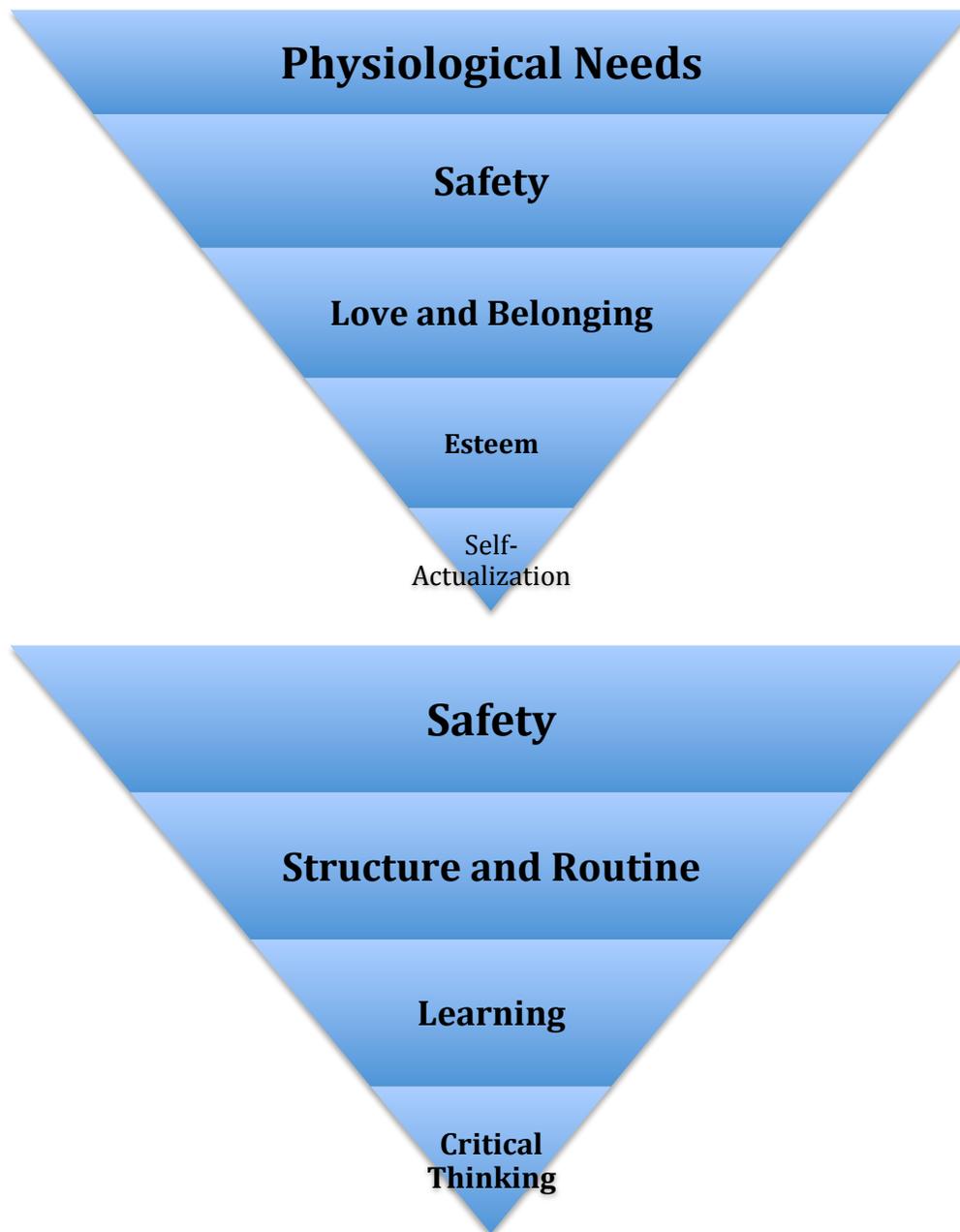
The first stage in growth is admitting that one is imperfect, and studies on third person effect (Davison, 1983) seem to indicate that we, as a society, are in denial.

Silverblatt (1995) insists that because most media are visual and thus affective (which also makes them enjoyable), it's very challenging to cognitively invest in their

interpretation. Even further, delving into the regulatory and transactive aspects of media production is something that students need plenty of scaffolding with, and even then, thinking about men in suits is probably the most boring aspect of media studies (Wollen, 1991). Unfortunately, it will continue to be men in suits, like Senator Proxmire, who will steamroll funding for media education.

Parents, too, are more interested in their children becoming more computer literate for the marketplace than media literate (Kubey, 1998). Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Tyner (1998) described parents' needs of the public school system, which I have diagrammed in Figure 3.

Because the U.S. is the premier shaper of commercial media products, it's hard for us to linguistically and socially cognize its representations, unlike in other countries with high emphases on education (Kubey, 1998). Innis (1964) cautions us to “be aware of the extraordinary, perhaps insuperable, difficulty of assessing the quality of a culture of which we are a part” (p. 132). From that, we can deduce that perhaps the viewing of *foreign* media might better help prime us for higher order thinking, as our media does for people in other lands. In the meantime, teachers who show films in class usually do so as a “day off” or reward for students; unfortunately, “simply popping in a DVD or videocassette and letting the students watch the film is not being media literate, nor does it promote media literacy” (Christel & Sullivan, 2007, p. 3). With such rare implementation of active viewing, critical media literacy has yet to prove its effectiveness, and “still risks becoming a solution in search of a problem” (Tyner, 1998, p. 156).



**Figure 3:** Models of Maslow's and Tyner's Hierarchy of Needs <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> These are described more fully in the article that Maslow wrote for a psychological journal in 1943, in references.

#### 4.2. *Anti-Media Bias*

Forgetting about the more invidious issue of third person effect, many educators to this day seem to subscribe to more heavy effect theories that have long been refuted. In the U.S., many teachers have appeared at media literacy conferences “wishing to learn more about how to inoculate their charges against the media” (Kubey, 1998, p. 65). On some level, some of this objection is simply a Neoluddite expression, and some teachers simply see more flexibility and efficiency with chalkboards and workbooks, often due to lack of proficiency with classroom technologies (Cuban, 1986).

Leander (2007) and Watkins (2009) showed that teachers whose school required in-class laptops felt nostalgia for the halcyon days when students would look up and discuss on an interpersonal level. Lewis and Jhally (1998) underscore:

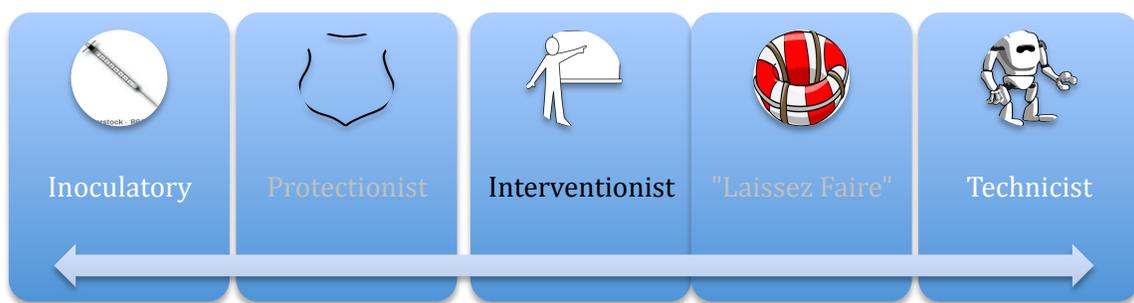
Educators, whether parents or teachers, are tired of competing with television. They are tired of dismissing it as mere distraction or else resenting it as the ‘evil twin’ of universal education, the proverbial devil with little substance and all the best tunes. They are also tired of being offered the rather smug retort to their complaints that if parents or citizens are unhappy with what’s offered, they can always turn it off. Most of us, after all, like watching what we consider to be worthwhile, informative, or entertaining. We don’t want it to go away. Most educators are aware that the bumper-sticker invocation to ‘kill your television’ has an ostrich-like impracticality. (p. 116).

While we must acknowledge that much popular media can contribute to various problems among youth, we as critical media pedagogues shouldn't “[oversimplify] the complexity of our relationship with media [or take] away the potential for empowerment that critical pedagogy and alternative media production offer” (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 60).

Moreover, as the incoming workforce of teachers becomes increasingly “digitally native,” the bias against media amongst teachers may become less pronounced.

### 4.3. Lack of Consensus among Critical Media Literacy Practitioners

It would be highly problematic for those versed in critical/cultural studies to ever sit down and come to a final agreement or interpretation of media in society. This impossibility can alienate other teachers from potentially taking any of their cues in order to reconsider their inoculatory or decriticalized approaches (Jenkins, et al. 2009; Kubey, 1998; Wyatt, & Silva, 2007). The goal for teachers working with critical media literacy should hover towards interventionism (Hobbs, 2007), or facilitating the idea that media engages in manipulating activities for specific reasons, but that students can reclaim their identities through their own creative media projects (See Figure 4 for a continuum). This will be a challenge, as inoculation and technicism seem to be the strains that are best funded (as they are “public health” and marketplace boons, respectively). Ultimately, they fail with children exhausted by the anti-media posturing of inoculationism and conscribed to a lack of creative flexibility in technicism (Hobbs, 2007; Kubey, 1998). Unfortunately, the field of media education appears to be “too new and amorphous” to be well funded, particularly since no longitudinal studies exist (Tyner, 1998, p. 147).



**Figure 4:** Continuum of Educational Approaches toward Media Literacy<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “Laissez faire” media education is not technically in the literature, but for my purposes, it fit in with some of the approaches and attitudes of teachers with whom I spoke.

#### 4.4. *Time and Space*

In 1977, a study was performed on teachers in West Virginia who were encouraged to incorporate video lessons into their teaching sequences (Cuban, 1986). Afterward they were asked why they didn't incorporate this media more, and a majority responded that it was inconvenient or they didn't have time. And these were teachers who were *provided* materials. Without knowing what some of the most promising materials are to incorporate into class time, teachers are forced to spend even more time outside of the class seeking out good media lessons. Studies by Kubey (1998) and Manzi & Rowe (1991) indicate that additional classroom time for critical media literacy exercises, especially those including the creation of media, can be quite burdensome, especially since teachers have to stay on certain tasks in the mandated curriculum.

As Kennedy (2005) offers in her landmark book about teachers' resistance to reform, the teacher's instructional scope is so peppered with interruptions as it is, whether they be lengthy holidays, weekends, half-days, or more microcosmic issues such as classroom management and P.A. announcements. Furthermore, few would argue with teachers' commitment to text-centered literacy taking precedence over critical explorations of the media; even knowing that there are standards that demand students' attention to media literacy, many teachers must focus first on reading fluency for students to achieve with the core skills and content.

#### 4.5. *Standardized Testing*

The prioritization of alphabetical literacy is now heightened in the age of high-stakes standardized testing. As beneficial as critical media education might be, this is rarely possible in the U.S. school system thanks to a “back to basics” movement, which some label illusory in its approach (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Scheibe, 2004; White & Walker 2008). Tyner (1998) describes the purpose of this testing as such:

When standards, classroom tasks, and student assessment are aligned, teachers can better recognize when learning takes place. If students are not making progress in their learning, or if they are falling behind, a standards-driven curriculum provides teachers with a kind of “map” that helps them to identify the appropriate remedial or customized intervention that enables the student to succeed and go on to the next learning challenge.

At least in theory (p. 201).

Tests, in fact, exist less to surveil the abilities of students than to surveil those of the administration and teachers at the school. A more confrontational way to put it would be to say, “Standardized scores are used to publicly humiliate schools, to transfer teachers, and to generally reconstitute schools.” (Ibid., p. 202). So many in the public sphere hold test scores over the schools' heads, and teachers feel a strict need to teach to the tests.

These tests and critical pedagogy, plainly stated, are irreconcilable. Some have suggested that the expectations to teach certain elements of the curriculum in accordance with standards need not necessarily be incompatible with critical media literacy (Hammett, 2004; Kubey, 2008), but the educational discourse has clearly shifted away from Dewey and Freire “toward a deficit-thinking model of education, where the students who fail are punished instead of helped” (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 380). These tests are stacked against the poor and minorities, but critical media literacy is contingent on

inclusivity and diversity. Tyner (1998) sums it up: “Advocates must be prepared to accept that some communities will embrace traditional educational ideals that include a goal of critical literacy as a tangential element, if at all” (p. 223). The application of standards in critical media literacy is not a feasible solution.

#### 4.6. *Teacher Autonomy*

Perhaps the literature’s most pessimistic perception of constraint in enabling critical media literacy in the classroom is the lack of teacher autonomy and creativity that seems to exist in the United States. Kubey (1998) shares a personal communication he had with an educator from the outside looking in.

According to Australian media educator Peter Greenaway of Deakin University, teachers in the U.S. are treated as low-level ‘process workers’ who need to be given textbooks and told how to teach by others (personal communication, May 15, 1992). Elsewhere, teachers often have more autonomy and responsibility, and the teaching innovations, which are often a hallmark of media education, are more readily enacted (p. 60).

As was mentioned with the constraint of time, teachers in the U.S., for various reasons beyond the scope of my research, indeed have comparatively more incentive to perform their duties based on top-down mandates than do teachers in other countries with as well-funded school systems. Teaching, however, is not the military—to incorporate media reform in the classroom, teachers must be given a rationale to educate children in media literacy, not simply be commissioned to do so.

#### 4.7. *Teacher Education*

Perhaps the constraint with the most implications is the need for teacher education, not just in critical media literacy strategies, but in media studies in general. Only in doing this can future (or current) teachers and administrators plumb the depths of media analysis and become conversant in strategies for their media literacy curricula.

Many voices in the literature (Butler, 2010; Cuban, 2001; Hobbs, 2007; Kemmitt, 2007) lament the lack of pedagogical training in teacher's colleges, sometimes placing the blame on communications departments (Frechette, 2002; Tyner, 2008) for their lack of interdisciplinarity. To be fair, there are countless constraints on communications departments to outsource their faculty's expertise to other departments. But the fact remains that schools of education are about 40 years behind in teaching pre-service teachers visual literacy, critical-viewing skills and media education (Frechette, 2002, Kubey, 1998). Will this change, as the new crop of teachers entering U.S. ranks are more and more digitally native? Lewis (2007) doesn't seem to think so:

It's not just about my generation of middle-aged teachers who are uncomfortable with new orientations to time, space, performance, creativity, and design. My pre-service teachers tend not to be comfortable with these new orientations either. Popular technologies are to be used and shared out-of-school. To do so in school challenges the materiality of what it means to be a teacher, in their minds (p. 235).

This may hold less water as the participatory culture emerges. The paradigm is shifting in the core standards, as well, and there is a lot at stake in managing a classroom so disparately mediated between teacher and students. For example, Kubey (1998) mentions that some teachers committed to critical media literacy have gone so far as to pay for their own professional development in using educational media; with the advent of Web

2.0, more and more free resources have become available so that teachers need not pay for various tutorials and resources.

Tyner (1998) claims, however, that instructors teach critical media literacy obliquely, even without being conscientious about its purposes. Many are internally motivated by their own passion about a current issue in the media, or they feel the need to model concepts with the help of media that are more accessible to students; now, more and more, media are becoming a part of their curriculum (Christel & Sullivan, 2007). Even with these possibilities in mind, there is critical need for training, as highlighted by Butler (2010):

Absent teacher training, more problems arise than are solved in a media studies classroom. Absent teacher training, teachers interested in incorporating media education concepts do so based on their own colloquial knowledge. This may limit the breadth and depth of media studies inclusion, especially witnessed in the reliance on technology (p. 197).

Thus, the worry becomes less that teachers will tend towards an inoculationist stance, and more towards a technicist stance, which favors critical analysis much less.

## **5. Research Justifications**

According to the theory of symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 2000), people construct their own history but are in dialogue with the structures around them. This theory, common to social philosophy especially in America, incorporates tenets from the pragmatists William James, John Dewey, Charles Pierce and George Herbert Mead. Len Vygotsky, James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium, and Anthony Giddens have spearheaded its continuity in the contemporary research literature. Two of those names happen to also

be pivotal in educational studies: Dewey and Vygotsky. Both educationists, working around the same time but never “interacting,” as it were (Vygotsky's works were not published in a non-Soviet context until 1962), stressed the child's need to interact and socialize in order to achieve higher order thinking and autonomy (Dewey, 1938; Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995).

Denzin imparts that, in symbolic interactionism, “Every individual is a practical social agent, but human agents are constrained by structural rules, by material resources, and by the structural processes connected to class, gender, race, ethnicity, nation and community” (p. 82). Some of its main premises are:

- Humans interact with things based on those things' utility.
- Meaning derives from this interaction.
- These meanings can shift upon reflecting and applying these meanings in social situations.
- Humans create their own experiences.
- Experiences form their selfhood.
- The self and reflexivity of selfhood shape interaction with others.
- Society is comprised of these interactions, which lead to actions.
- This process is anchored in the circuit of culture (Du Gay, et al. 1997), as instilled by mass media.

That final premise is clearly relevant to how people in the field of education make assumptions about students' use of media in the classroom.

Denzin asserts that cultural narratives in neoliberal cultures “give members the illusion of a soul, of structural freedom and free will. Thus do the circuits of culture... implement this system of commodification” (p. 83). However, symbolic interactionism is not deterministic or essentialist: “Interactionists reject totalizing, grand theories of the social” as Lyotard's grand narratives did, and would rather focus on localities and identities among those who can interface together, a concept with clear shades of Dewey's philosophy. “It is not possible to study experience directly, so symbolic interactionists study how narratives, connected to systems of discourse (interviews, stories, and the like), represent [sic] experiences” (p. 85). This theory intersects with various modern and postmodern commitments to educational theory and media theories, especially those included in this paper. What Freire (1998) has said can legitimately connect to symbolic interactionism, as well:

It's the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined. The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming. The subjectivity with which I dialectically relate to the world, my role in the world, is not restricted to a process of only observing what happens, but it also involves my intervention as a subject of what happens in the world (pp. 72-73).

So it is with critical pedagogy and symbolic interactionism that I have guided my research process and inquiry, and from the literature, have identified and framed the various structural constraints from which pedagogues and other individuals may interact. Because my task is to determine what types of information are missing from the research, and the perspectives grounded in critical pedagogy and symbolic interactionism deal with the actions of teachers and the interpretations of individuals in their lives, I observed that an obvious voice from the literature was missing: those of teachers.

## **6. Research Gap**

To be sure, many of the articles and books I read not only incorporated the verbalized concerns of teachers, but many (and possibly all) were also written by active educators themselves. Nevertheless, thanks due in part to the critical and cultural intellectual practices of the authors, they examined institutional and instrumental matters, and in some cases, elicited feedback of students themselves as data. A portion of the research employed quantitative methods, and some research appeared to report a narrative observation.

The most similar research to mine can be located in the work of Tyner (1998) and Kubey (1998), as well as Goodman's (2003) summaries of restraints of enacting critical media literacy in the classroom. Some authors have discussed the general difficulty of applying critical pedagogy to the American classroom (hooks, 1994; Shor, 1980). Cuban (1986) explored how teachers responded to new media in their classrooms, and he concluded that it was conservatively. On the other hand, Scheibe (2004) shows that teachers have been shown to be enthusiastic about media in the classroom. Flores-Koulish (2007) uses mixed methods (survey and focus groups) to understand the extent to which pre-service teachers understand the purposes of critical media literacy. In terms of applying the method of semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis to discussions with teachers and their classroom experience, Cortazzi's work (1993) provides a wealth of information, but does not specifically target critical pedagogies or media literacy.

All of this research has been crucial in influencing my understanding of the context of critical media literacy, and the vastness of these academics' priorities have

offered me a holistic view. I chose to narrow my focus on the perspectives of teachers themselves, examining how their stories intersect with the qualities of critical media literacy in the classroom, and what types of structures exist to limit their practice of it.

#### Research Questions:

RQ1: In what ways do teachers perceive the need for critical media literacy?

RQ2: How do the self-described constraints of teachers match up with what appears in the literature?

RQ2a: How do teachers evince a bias against the media?

RQ2b: How do teachers perceive consensus and mandates in the teaching of media literacy?

RQ2c: How is time a constraint against teaching media literacy?

RQ2d: What types of materials and resources do teachers report using in order to teach media literacy?

RQ2e: In what ways are teachers autonomous in their classroom pursuits of media literacy?

RQ2f: In what sense are teachers constrained by standardized testing and curricular goals?

RQ2g: How have teachers' pre-service and professional learning environments affected their applications of media literacy?

RQ3: How is critical media literacy applied by middle and secondary school teachers?

The literature has shown that the goal of critical media literacy is to offer transparency to media—acknowledging how the circuit of culture manages to intervene in their realities. For various reasons, however, critical media literacy is not just rarely practiced in the U.S., but is not even a part of the public school teachers’ lexicon. The research that I have conducted extracts information from this “lack” in a way that has not been addressed before in the literature: by putting a premium on the teacher’s voice.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the nature of some teachers' beliefs about their teaching about media in the classroom as it has been defined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the study design is discussed in terms of the researcher's paradigm, the sample populations, some assumptions, the choice of interviewing as a technique for gathering information, the structure of the interviews, an accounting for bias, and finally, the structure for analyzing the teachers' responses.

#### **1. Paradigm**

Given the variability of research commitments and disciplines that populate the review of literature, many ideas will influence how the research has been designed and ultimately is read. The values of symbolic interactionism guide my evaluations of the data produced by the conversations I had with teachers about their constraints using critical media literacy.

Those faithful to critical media literacy follow a Socratic method of questioning structures, producers, messages, and audiences: essentially, viewing the circuit of culture holistically. This qualitative, exploratory method is an excellent tool for cultural analysis, for culture and language are nearly impossible to quantify. Though quantitative and experimental methods are more strictly endorsed in the field of education, Toma (2001) says that qualitative research methods are interpretive and inductive in nature,

disallowing proof or disproof and generalizability as goals of research. Instead, locating personal and local interpretations of individual experiences, and conveying them richly, should be the goal of qualitative research.

## **2. Population and Sample**

Ideally, research could reach saturation with a sampling from a representative multitude of districts. Unfortunately, there are 15,746 school districts in the United States.

This work, therefore, stayed in the confines of exploratory research. Using a snowball sample and anonymized recruitment, I contacted middle and secondary school teachers in practicable places for me to conduct research, and I interviewed until a critical mass of perspectives was demonstrated (see Exemption Approval, Appendix C). The recruitment and interviewing process took a course of six weeks. In the end, I interviewed 13 teachers in the Mid-Atlantic and one in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Profiles of these teachers can be located in Appendix D. I knew the selected sample would not produce a statistically significant range of different backgrounds (not that this is a goal within my research paradigm). Still, the table shows a diversity of backgrounds based on my inclusion criteria.

I interviewed 14 current or recently retired middle and high school English Language Arts or Social Studies Teachers in public schools. The constituency of this sample is fitting because:

- Current teachers currently experience the stories of their students' learning on a day-to-day basis. Recently retired teachers are a little bit more removed, but can still generally reflect on their personal narratives in the classroom. In the case of my participants, two who were retired were still participating in the field of curriculum and instruction, and one was preparing to redirect her career towards legal advocacy in the underserved inner-city neighborhoods in which she once taught.
- Middle school and high school are generally the loci where faculties associated with critical literacy are developed in the curriculum (Goodman, 2003; Share, 2010; Wyatt & Silva, 2007).
- Several studies have noted the applicability of critical media literacy to English (Bruce & Levin, 2003; Butler, 2010; Cox, 2003; Goodman, 2003; Hobbs, 2007; Kemmitt, 2007; Silverstone, 1999; 17, Tyner, 1998) and social studies (Abdi, 2007; Butler, 2010; Fleischer, 2007; Kemmit, 2007; Malott & Porfilio, 2007; Scharrer, 2007; Wollen, 1991; Wyatt & Silva, 2007), but few, if any, related the pedagogy to math or science. Since English and social studies are core subjects in our public school system, it would provide diminishing returns to seek out teachers in non-required subjects (i.e. foreign language, the arts, physical education), electives (journalism), or different placement levels (advanced, honors, talented and gifted, special education), although some teachers also met those criteria.

- Teachers in private and parochial schools experience different mechanisms of constraint on their time and instructional autonomy, so I sought the voices of public school teachers, who encounter more mutual curricular mechanisms. This still allowed for a diversity of experiences with different American student populations based on socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural statuses.

### **3. Investigative Techniques**

Semi-structured interviews allow teachers to express their own concepts of critical media literacy, and narratize the extent to which they apply it. Interview participants aren't passive conduits of research, but rather meaning makers (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Warren (2001) adds, “[Participants]—both researchers and respondents—speak to each other not from stable and coherent standpoints, but from varied *perspectives*” (p. 84). The purpose of a semi-structured interview is to understand the participants' cultural milieu in their professions and callings as teachers.

The types of questions in the interview arose out of general questions based on the literature's classifications of the research questions and constraints. The interviews were recorded with consent and a pledge of confidentiality, as delineated by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oregon. Appendix E shows the interview guide I used for all fourteen of my interviews.

#### **4. Instrumentation**

To incite a teacher's rich involvement in a topic, I formulated open-ended questions about applying media literacy and using media in the classroom (See Appendix E). The interviews lasted anywhere from 35 to 90 minutes, were digitally recorded and later transcribed by myself. I decided to record the interviews because this offered the possibility of gaining richer, more detailed statements and so that I could more fully concentrate on their body language and interject at appropriate moments. This helped maintain a relaxed, conversational atmosphere.

From these conversations, discussions of teachers' narratives coursed into directions of their own choosing, often including visual demonstrations of classroom experiences, or examples of worksheets that they had synthesized and used in lessons. I refrained from committing to any close reading of these components, as they might demand a different form of analysis. As I will outline in the research's limitations, close document analysis (along with observational and experimental research) would help verify the claims of teachers' experiences.

#### **5. Analysis**

The semi-structured interviews provided diverse information from the participants. To remain consistent with the scope of this study, I felt it necessary to select the aspects of the interviews that correspond with the dimensions of constraint determined in the research, with an allowance for articulation of emergent data in which

the participants described constraints or elaborations on critical media literacy. With these considerations in mind, eight aspects of the interviews were selected for analysis:

- Need or Desire for critical reflection
- Anti-Media bias
- Consensus and Mandates
- Time Constraints
- Materials and Resources
- Collaboration and autonomy
- Standardized tests
- Teacher Education and Professional Development

Additionally, I discussed evidence of critical media literacy practices, and some other constraints or problematizations of teachers' interactions with students and media.

As outlined by Institutional Review Board's exemption for this research, I have created pseudonyms for the study's participants. As a result of the tendency for some teachers to speak softly, or make false starts as they organized their thoughts, it was necessary to do some venial editing, either with ellipses, brackets, or omitted transitional particles (“um,” “uh,” “you know,” “like”). The general procedure I followed was to have the interviews transcribed as soon as possible after they were recorded and then to review, analyze and edit the transcriptions while the interviews were still fresh in my mind.

In the analysis of the responses, the basic intent, concordant with symbolic interactionism, was to deal with what teachers could articulate in a self-conscious

manner. During the conduct of the interviews, I attempted to ask questions to which teachers could respond naturalistically, and they were very forthcoming when they were confused by my line of questioning. As such, if the respondent was unable to clearly articulate his or her assumptions about his or her constraints, those data are not substantively accounted for in the findings.

Narrative analysis means studying the human experience in terms of the way people tell and frame stories. Following the teacher's voice (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 2000) means to collect “the questions and problems that teachers pose, the frameworks they use to interpret and improve their practice, and the ways teachers themselves define and understand their work lives” (As cited in Cortazzi, 1993, p. 10). Following symbolic interactionist Mead (1934), the self is not entirely individual, but is defined by socialization (as cited in Cortazzi, 1993). Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994) call the analysis I carry out “macrotextual,” in that the narrative of an individual verbalizes his or her conceptualizations of the social sphere: “This approach views texts as symbolic action, or means to frame a situation, define it, grant it meaning, and mobilize appropriate responses to it” (p. 465). In this sense, interview narratives offer directed self-expression with an individualized vocabulary that communicates those expressions to others. In the interviews, participants made sense of their circumstances through my interview questions, and I divulge and analyze the data that proves most salient to the literature's outlined restraints, show instances of participants' experiences and beliefs that assimilated into Freire's critical pedagogy, and furnish and analyze data that did not necessarily fit into the other categories.

As any student of English knows (or English teacher hopes he or she knows), metaphors are used to describe ideas, events and situations figuratively, not with the concreteness of named, and visibly signified objects. So much of our language is metaphor—indeed every word in this sentence is.<sup>15</sup> I tried to listen for metaphorical ways that teachers described their teaching practices and ways they see that students seem to cognize lessons, whether or not they were centered around media. These narratives would linguistically reveal attitudes about their individual teaching philosophies. I also tried to interpret this in their rich ways of describing media.

## **6. Assumptions**

I expected most of my participants to have thought about critical and cultural studies in ways that differ from my own commitments. I also assumed that teachers' main impetus is conditioned by the constraints of their job, and that there would be some tensions between their desires to edify and their teaching culture's various pressures. Ultimately, teachers' perceptions of their behaviors and what might actually happen in class are completely different. Since my method allows for teachers to tell, not show their stories, it has a decidedly different thrust than an ethnographically-based study, and I had to assume that their reporting of events was honestly reflective of their experiences.

In respect to their interactions and formulations of the circuit of culture, I generally did not directly prompt them based on the relatively arcane term “critical media literacy,” since the literature demonstrates its absence in teacher's colleges. Their

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<sup>15</sup> Aside, arguably, from “word” and “sentence,” since we can point to those things.

independent study and practice in the classroom, however, is obviously much more variable. Sometimes, to elicit richer information, I would help define my polyvalent terms, namely “media,” which can be interpreted in so many ways.

## **7. Bias**

Bias was unavoidable, here, because of my own desires to eke out a conversation about something that does not necessarily sit squarely in a teacher's proscribed priorities in the classroom. Given the wide differences of backgrounds these teachers have in various school settings, those biases are acknowledged by the investigator.

For these conversations to have taken place, I had to topographically “meet halfway” with individuals; in order to ensure accurate transcription, I had to meet in places that would dissuade interference, but I did my best to prioritize meeting in places that were convenient for participants. In some cases, this meant places that were loaded by the participants' professional experiences (classrooms after hours or conference rooms during class hours), or their personal experiences (their homes). To me, this range of “topography” is no less loaded than having all participants conduct interviews in a lab setting. In a few cases, biological children, cleaning personnel, spouses, pets and other actors entered the interview space, but it bears repeating that my first priority was to meet where these extraordinarily busy people would graciously afford me their time. In all cases, I left the conversation on cordial terms, and but for a few, mostly expected, interruptions, the participants did not display much agitation during the course of the

interview—there were fleeting moments of tenseness or minor catharsis or exasperation at certain recollections, but nothing that stood in the way of their fashioning genuine and eloquent responses. I needed to take for granted that participants in this study were honest, but I offered a raffled incentive of a \$75 gift card to increase the response rate.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The guiding principle of this chapter is the elicitation and illustration of major themes that ran through the teacher's responses to the research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do teachers perceive the need for critical media literacy?

RQ2: How do the self-described constraints of teachers match up with what appears in the literature?

RQ2a: How do teachers evince a bias against the media?

RQ2b: How do teachers perceive consensus and mandates in the teaching of media literacy?

RQ2c: How is time a constraint against teaching media literacy?

RQ2d: What types of materials and resources do teachers report using in order to teach media literacy?

RQ2e: In what ways are teachers autonomous in their classroom pursuits of media literacy?

RQ2f: In what sense are teachers constrained by standardized testing and curricular goals?

RQ2g: How have teachers' pre-service and professional learning environments affected their applications of media literacy?

RQ3: How is critical media literacy applied by middle and secondary school teachers?

While the broad categories of analysis have been imposed (need or desire for critical reflection, anti-media bias, consensus and mandates, time constraints, materials and resources, collaboration and autonomy, standardized tests, teacher education and professional development), the discussion of these categories has arisen out of the general themes of the responses. In the course of studying each interview, I identify ideas and examples to draw out these general themes, but I have not exhaustively reported every single response.

One of the limitations of critical media literacy (and media literacy in general) that the literature reflected was, in many cases, a symptomatic reading, or reading into an absence of narrative: a lack of impetus from educational institutions to apply critical analyses in the classroom for reasons of corporate co-option, parental priorities, and lack of national self-awareness. I did not explicitly couch my questions in these external, instrumental and invisible sources of pressure, since those questions would be much more difficult to answer. I focused on letting teachers air narratives that affected them more personally, but I did not forbid myself from reading between the lines when necessary.

### **1. Research Question 1**

In what ways do teachers perceive the need for critical media literacy?

All teachers in this study placed a premium on critical thinking; not many expressed a view of criticality in its sociopolitical sense, but rather as a skill that is taught for textual and social analysis. Though there were some outliers, most responses about whether students thought critically about the media indicated that they did not, and

certainly not without having instructed about it. Overall, the interviewees would indicate that students *did* need to reflect on the media's role in their lives, as evidenced by the responses to the question: “To what extent do you think students are aware of the impact media has on them?”

**Alicia:** I don't think they *do* think about media critically. I think they think of it as just being the air they breathe, the water they drink that is so part of the world, that they don't—they can't separate themselves from, overall, the media.

**Frank:** Some people out there seem to be addicted to Facebook, for example, or other social media—it's consumed some people alive! And I have to think it's a part of that individual's personality, but part of that's those people weren't prepared adequately to handle that onslaught of different social media, that they've plugged into or chosen to participate in. But you know, I think media is so huge these days that I think it really warrants a lot of attention.

**Heloise:** I mean, that's sort of the what media is. It doesn't want you to notice its impact, right?

**Jamila:** They know how to access it and they know how to use it, but they don't know how to evaluate it.

**Lauren:** I think that for the most part, most kids just take what they see t face value. They see it and they just go with it. Accept it. Accept it as fact. It just seems that there's not real thought or concern. They're kind of like, “Oh, yeah, well, look at that. Hmm. Great.” Like it just washes over them.

Kristin is the only teacher who answered this question “Yes,” with no hesitation, adding that students were starting to make connections of her lessons to their personal and mediated realities. When it comes to media, teaching students how to be critical alone usually is not enough of a defense to practice what they have learned (Abji, 2007; Butler, 2010; Cuban, 1986; Jenkins, et al. 2009; Rozendaal, van Reijmersdal, Buijzen, & Lapierre, 2011). This would not meet Masterman's requisite of being autonomously critical (Masterman, 1985). Certainly, just because most teachers agreed that students had

a stronger need to look at media critically, this does not necessarily ally with the belief that students should be educated in *critical* media literacy.

Ivy says students are much more critical of text than they are of visual representations. Ivy reported the surprise she found when she thought “they'd believe everything they read, but actually, [they] challenge most things that they read.” On the other hand, she reports, her students seem to accept reality television's narratives as gospel. This observation reflects Silverblatt's (1995) analysis that because visual literacy is so affective, we respond to it much more contentedly. This dichotomy must be greater for Ivy's students, who struggle with reading anyway—it is easier for them to dismiss something that they cannot easily interact with or relate to.

Barbara wonders if an elective class on media would attract students: “I wonder if because the students already deal with so many types of media so often in their daily lives, they might think, why do I need a course in it?” She goes on to condition her response, saying financial literacy has started to crop up as requirement for graduation, and how this might become the case with media literacy. Reading the narrative of this reveals a known institutional commitment to economic knowledge above the exploration of cultural conditions in society. Somewhat contrary to that, when asked the same question, Deborah responded that it might attract students too much, saying a course like that might create unrealistic expectations about students' professional futures.

Some teachers were much more ambivalent about media literacy coursework. While on one hand, Jamila mentioned wanting students to have required lessons from the

media specialists about media literacy, she responded to the question about incorporating media into the curriculum more in a dialectical narrative:

I think kids need to have media literacy. Do I think media literacy needs to be something that's a separate subject taught at the schools? No. Because I don't think media literacy in and of itself is a separate subject. I think it's integrated among all subjects. So would I suggest that it's important for every teacher to incorporate it into their lesson plans? Yes... But should it take precedence over all the other stuff that they're being required to learn? No, not necessarily no. But it is important, yeah.

Max, however, completely deconstructed the premise of the question of whether media literacy should be taught. He asserts that it is and always has been. "Media is as central to social studies as experiments are to science!" Later, he strongly affirmed the need for media literacy in this country, which may be guided by a protectionist belief: "There's propaganda spewing from every corner of this country. Being able to recognize that is the first step to being able to be independent and make your own decisions instead of having them made for you without even realizing it." Nils echoes this, saying media literacy is *just* as important as other skills traditionally taught, because "technology and the audiovisual space with which we live dominates every aspect of our lives," concluding that schools should actually have media literacy classes. Though this may not be easy to accomplish in practice, it echoes Jenkins' predictions (2009) that all schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to "master the skills and knowledge [students] need to function in a hypermediated environment" (p. 109).

As per the Back to Basics movement, teachers did seem to have their priorities in order, expressing that reading and writing and problem-solving skills come before media

literacy, and that their positions as teachers come before the use of media as a classroom tool.

## **2. Research Question 2a**

### How do teachers evince a bias against the media?

From the varied mentions in the literature of the inoculationists and Neoluddites, previous research would have us believe that teachers are a fearful bunch. In my conversations about media used in and out of the classroom, in an array of community settings, this was simply not the case. Most teachers from different generations incorporated both media technology and media products whenever they could, and many lamented that there was not more in their classrooms. Kristin defied her circumstances of working in poorly-funded districts and purchased a lot of expensive equipment on her own or with grants, because her districts were unwilling to make an investment without seeing proof of the educational technology's effectiveness.

On the frequency of their media use in the classroom, many teachers say it is a no-brainer. Others were hesitant, and after much thought and consideration to the wide scope of what comprised media, they modified their answers. There were some expressions of reliance on educational technology that had entered their classrooms, saying that it is vital to engaging both the student and teacher. Lauren explained its necessity very pithily: “It's not as effective, generally, with most kids to stand and talk at them because they're just not used to getting information in that way.” Of the various things teachers said media scaffold, the most primary are reading and lecture.

In regards to reading, teachers offered excellent illustrations of how they have incorporated media and popular culture to scaffold their lessons.

**Alicia:** I can't envision doing the reading without doing some level of [interactive] media as well.

**Barbara:** Whatever piece of media I've brought them, it gives them a deeper understanding of the literature.

**Cassidy:** Once they had that emotional connection through the visuals, I think they were able to more critically get involved in the text itself.

**George:** If I'm ever taking notes on this Promethean board, they love to get the pen and use it. It's pretty cool, they'll very much so volunteer to come up and mark a text up.

**Heloise:** Film versions of books...[are] really helpful particularly when it comes to Shakespeare, because people have a really hard time conceptualizing how the words are supposed to be acted.

**Ivy:** We did an *Anne Frank* unit and it wasn't until I pulled up Holocaust pictures of the concentration camps and the survivors that it clicked. But watching them watch that, they get it. That's the stuff they remember. They're very visual learners. It just resonates a lot more.

These very positive reactions almost denote a “laissez faire” approach to interacting with media for learning. Teachers benefit from the features and convenience of technology and media in their work, and as Jamila says, technology keeps them from getting bored of doing the same lesson. Many describe media and technology's indispensability in their classrooms during direct instruction.

**Alicia:** There are a lot of staff that don't use [the Promethean board]; I don't know how they make that work, but they don't... I can't live without it now, it's like I'm married to this thing.

**Deborah:** To say how many thousands landed on the beach means nothing unless they see the slaughter of the Germans raking us and so forth.

**Ivy:** I use it a lot for getting them to understand things quickly, being able to see them. Since I have so many struggling readers, it is so much easier to just pull up things on [the Smartboard].

**Jamila:** You go to visuals first. You put something up. You draw the kids in. You have them do something. You know, first thing with any lesson is you build a connection. You make them respond to something and you talk about it there, you get them vested. The higher level thinking stuff doesn't come till later, until you've bought in.

**Kristin:** I definitely always use some sort of media to kick off a whole group lesson to get us all on the same page.

**Max:** I...use them as an exercise to get them into more higher order thinking in general.

All signs point to the idea that teachers use media to drive home skills and content knowledge, which makes learning more fun and memorable for them; some even mentioned that it gets students to higher order thinking. This idea excited the participating teachers, even though “critical thinking” is not considered a priority for parents (Tyner, 1998). Nevertheless, teachers are definitely constrained from discussing the media more in terms of the media’s role in society.

Overall, in terms of where teachers might be placed on the Inoculationist-Technicist spectrum, I would assert that most would range from interventionist to laissez-faire. The former aligns with many more cultural studies-oriented pedagogues, and the latter might indicate the types of teachers who have internalized a discriminative view of the media, but not a critical one. Indeed, what they chose to use in the classroom was very measured, and the constraint lay more in what the culture of the school (specifically, the regulatory aspect of the circuit) deemed appropriate.

**Alicia:** I'm loving YouTube! There's a lot of appropriate clips, but you gotta be careful sometimes—people put on lots of “stuff” out there.

**Ivy:** Most of our websites are blocked. You know, can't get on YouTube, can't do really anything, and yesterday I got a code to get on it.

**Kristin:** They're like, "Well, Lupe Fiasco wrote a song that talks about what we're doing..." If it's not explicit, I'm more than happy to pull it up and share it with the students.

**Nils:** You had to get a sticker to be able to use the computers on campus. And for whatever reason, some of them, if they didn't pay something or if they got in trouble, then they didn't get the sticker.

Several teachers also mentioned using WebQuest, in which web sources can be pre-selected and vetted by the school's networks to run academic searches, as well as by the teachers; as Alicia says, "I can actually rig the computer so that it can only go" to sites suited for her lesson. Then again, Nils remarked, "[Students] all seemed to know how to get around...the school censorship blocks." These different attitudes reflect the attitudes of protectionism, and Nils acknowledges that the students resist the prescribed rules of media engagement, just as Buckingham (1998) would have predicted.

Teachers also expressed a need to assume the role of gatekeeper, especially since children are so bombarded with media, in their perception. For example, Barbara is concerned with the agenda social networking sites set:

**Barbara:** I believe it is true for the teenage population I teach, that maybe the only "news"--and I say that in quotes, "news"--that they are exposed to or that they think is the most prevalent news out there is what they're seeing popped up as the links on Facebook, or Twitter.

**Principal Investigator:** And what do you think that says about them as consumers?

**Barbara:** I think that they need to become more worldly in how they get their news. They need to expand beyond that... Go back to bias again. I don't know that they are presented with the facts in an objective way. And so they—the opinions

that they form, then, are really just regurgitating opinions that others have already stated.

Barbara reiterates the term worldly later in the interview, again describing the narrowness of students' awareness of their worlds. She states, "Your goal with education is always to broaden the students' horizons." Indeed, this can't be borne without the motivated interventionism of teachers, and Freire would put forward that a further teaching of the "word" would expand the "worlds" of these relatively privileged, but apparently somewhat credulous students. In defense of his students, Max generalized to the whole culture: "I don't think most adults think about how much their reality is controlled by the media. I mean, I don't think that my students are the only ones who have stopped reading newspapers." Attitudes like these would indicate that teachers have dropped a very protectionist stance, assuming instead that students' media consumption mirrors that of adults in America. It still appears as if teachers want to intervene, so that students do not make the same mistakes as those adults.

Jamila had thought deeply about the effect of media on students, telling of books she had read and lectures she had attended on the role of media in students' lives. She showed some resistance to some evidence she had read into those texts, ones that she described to me seemed closely aligned with the more laissez-faire or technicist critiques of Prensky (2009, 2001a, 2001b), Tapscott (2009), and Watkins (2009).

[The speaker's] goal was to engage teachers in how kids' brains are affected differently because of media, because of the fast imagery and how they compress this and how they can multitask. Essentially his premise was we need to switch the way we teach because these kids can multitask and they're doing good and we have to switch and do soundbytes for them. Recently, I saw [another] study and they say kids are *not* successful because they are multitasking... so getting their neurons really superficially going, but they're not getting any of the deeper ones.

So their ability to critically think is not being, I don't know, pushed. Which, to me, that's huge. That's a big problem. Now, that's one study I heard. Is it factual? No. I think this is the time where we're learning these things and where we really need to take into consideration, how does the brain function and what are we doing, or how are these kids growing up if they don't know how to deeply think. That's dangerous to me! In kind of a scary way, if they're going to be the leaders, if they're making these spontaneous decisions without thinking...

Jamila seems as of yet unwilling to buy into these futuristic forays away from traditional literacies, ones that seem less likely to be critical than even the contemporary educational framework. In doubting the research's results in both cases, Jamila reveals an alienation from the progress of research (in questioning the results of both studies), in addition to the isolation she felt at the lecture, where she reported feeling as if she were the only one there who didn't jump on the Prenskyan bandwagon. She even reflected:

Gosh! Maybe I need to get out of teaching, I just really disagree with that. I think there are certain things we need to continue to keep teaching our kids even if they are in a different place that they're being inundated with fast messaging. They still need to learn to focus.

The Prenskys and the Jenkinses might call this educational attitude out-of-touch, but Jamila, like most teachers, is emphatic that the classroom model critical-thinking skills, which often involves deeper reflection that what the new media archetypes seem to provide. White and Walker (2007) might add: "...It becomes crucial to teach and remind students of the importance of public debate and deliberate decision making despite the tendency toward fast-paced reactionary attitudes" (p. 35).

Assessing the credibility of sources, now a core standard, seems to align with all respondents in both English and Social Studies, and in terms of information literacy, teachers expressed much more protection. Heloise notes:

I think the Internet Age has been a little bit difficult for students because, in the past, you know, they would do their research in books, and books don't change, books can be counted on. There [are] inaccuracies in books, obviously; there's skewed accounts in books. "History is written by the victors" and all that jazz. But I think the Internet has simultaneously made information really accessible to kids but also made the ability for misinformation to just absolutely blow up.

This reflection from Heloise does not just apply to students. She senses a wider cultural precedence for the ascent of inaccuracy in the hallowed halls of Congress. "And you get people saying things like 'Oh, well that wasn't intended to be a factual statement.' From the floor of Congress! That was a direct quote."

Of all the teachers that I interviewed, the one that carried the most passionate tenor at times was Deborah, expatiating on the content of the media in sometimes black-and-white terms: "Media can be used to inform us or it can be used to change us...Look at it critically and analyze: this is something that is pure information or is it trying to change me? Is it a campaign? Or is it straight information?" However, she adds immediately after this that the goal of having these discussions is to "empower them, that they can use media themselves." Additionally, Deborah was also one of the most eclectic in her uses of media, not only to assist instruction, but also to deconstruct culture. She went into great detail about her use of a wide variety of music, commercial and educational films, news texts, political cartoons, recorded oral histories, television clips, and Powerpoint presentations. She was very enthusiastic about showing this range of accessing multiple intelligences and engaging students with the material, often trying to prompt me to name a medium to see whether she had used it in instruction.

Heloise, at times, veered toward a more laissez-faire attitude of media literacy, but was promoting a view that most critical media literacy advocates demand: a greater balance and presence of modern technology in lesson planning:

I think the way schools view films is really outmoded and unfair. Schools don't want you to show movies anymore, or if they do show movies, they want you to show clips. I think that film literacy is really important because we get our news from TV and movies. A good film is not different from a good book. It's still the same sort of art, it still has character development and allusions and figurative language and literature and emotional meaning, so I think it's really shortsighted that English classes focus only on the written word.

This relatively radical view of film's legitimized equality with the written word is an important counterpoint to the assumptions of teachers' anti-media bias in the literature. Certainly, teachers did not parse out their students' illiteracies.

Plagiarism is another concern that teachers seem to worry about more with the Internet's now mandated role in core research standards. Related to the literature which showed that traditional literacy places a high emphasis on the stability of a text, some participants were very focused on aspects of the internet that weren't vetted. More of a concern, though, was students' lack of critical evaluation, as Jamila claims: "It's just far too easy for them to cut and paste and not really read." Lauren corroborates this when describing her students' Internet research.

A few teachers said that one aspect of media that needs more focus in the curriculum is the Internet, specifically, that Wikipedia is not a credible source. "Just because it's online, it's not an authority," Deborah emphasizes, as do Lauren and Nils. Jenkins, et al. (2009) decenter this view of knowledge as product, saying "knowledge is also always in process" and students need to understand the vetting process in order to

understand which sources to trust. Deborah later talks about how other forms of media can thwart the integrity of classes, and how she needs to actively regulate this: “Test day, I go around and I wear big pockets on test day because they will all text each other and et cetera!”

There were at least a few comments that actually leaned toward a technician view of media. Cassidy described her perception of an unsuccessful classroom, where the teacher “would just have the kids take turns reading from the story and that was it. And kids were going to walk away not having remembered anything.” She counters, “By incorporating more media, you're allowing a lesson to actually be taught instead of just sitting there and reading.” This phrasing contrasts media being the teacher in the *passive* voice, with *just* “sitting there and reading,” an activity which Cassidy implies is inactive. However, in her phrasing, and certainly in the minds of traditional literacy advocates and cognitive researchers, reading is a less sedentary learning activity than is watching a film clip. However, this rationale does line up with her commitment to teaching students with different learning styles, and visual comprehension is an integral point of access for visual learners.

Many of Frank's views seemed to be interventionist overall, but his experience with community outreach taught him public relations savvy:

In some educational circles, in public education, there's a paranoia or fear of media. That was not my philosophy. My philosophy was: Hey! Make good friends with, get to understand, have a good working relationship with and have the media with you! So the very first think I do whenever the educational reporter for local newspapers would change is I'd make a positive outreach call and just introduce myself and say we got a lot of positive things that are happening... It creates a greater understanding and even a greater empathy for you when even negative things *do* occur.

This type of outlook is important for creating dialogue with media practitioners, especially in participatory culture.

Overall, whatever bias there was against the media and social networking, in each participant's case, never seemed to be unmitigated by media's undeniable power as a teaching tool.

### **3. Research Question 2b**

#### How do teachers perceive consensus and mandates in the teaching of media literacy?

Perhaps, as the emerging core standards might indicate, teachers are getting more and more attuned to the idea of media analysis in their classrooms. Many teachers recoiled a little bit at the thought of getting mandates about media literacy, but a handful could name the emergent standards relating to media study in the classroom. Some of them also focused their attention on the technology standards that they feel more pressure to use. In my research, the core curricula seemed to be the standard-bearer for what was “consensus” because it was what they were accountable to. As such, many teachers framed their commentary more around how they achieved their goals in developing skills rather than developing content knowledge, or a learning relationship, in the more abstract, critically pedagogic sense.

George did elaborate on a directive from his principal who had probably more anti-media bias than did he and his colleagues:

I guess at the end of the school year, there is a tendency for a lot of teachers to show movies, and our principal tells us “It's not a film festival. We're not coming to school to watch movies,” that instruction must continue, but for us, *it is*

instruction. I'm not just watching, you know, "Transformers." We'd be watching something relevant.

Teachers were not simply using media as a "reward or 'day-off,'" either (Christel & Sullivan, 2007). Deborah elaborates on this point, "I would never put even a segment of a movie on without giving them questions because the automatic reaction is to put your head down and go to sleep!" As articulated before by Heloise, her desire to view film was contrary to her school's priorities, and though she feared reprisal, screened films anyway. Nils loved screening clips and entire films that he felt really affected students' abilities to understand an era, like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Life is Beautiful*, and *Forrest Gump*, which he says, "even the most jaded kids tend to at least sort of enjoy." This validation of film as a learning framework resonates with White & Walker's claims (2008) that film develops critical thinking and richly illustrates course concepts.

Teachers in schools with students at lower reading levels (all correlating with students in urban environments) did feel more pressure from their administration to focus on reading skills. In many cases, those skills needed to be drilled first and more frequently in order to tap into those students' successes with digital media. In response to whether she thinks media literacy should be applied more in the curriculum, Ivy explains: "I think there are so many things that need to happen. It's a hard question to answer when a lot of your kids are functioning on a third grade level, and you're trying to close that [gap] first."

Ivy did think that if core standards were to bring media literacy initiatives to the fore, that her administration would be very supportive of them, she said, not only because it would be obligated to, she claims, but "because the administration generally is very

into kids thinking hard about anything!” What she did spell out, however, when she discussed her previous school, was how different the administrations were in supporting students and teachers versus being very test-focused. If administrations *within one district* seem to have such vastly different top-down priorities, it would appear that achieving school-wide consensus on any issue, and critical media literacy might be the least of them, is an illusory goal.

I analyzed data that hinted at any degree or desire for canonical works, but most teachers were satisfied incorporating media on their own that was relevant to their lessons, communities and current events, suggesting that Buckingham’s comments on curricular flexibility (1998) were right on. Heloise would have liked to see a list of suggested films, just as there were core curriculum books, like *Julius Caesar*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Animal Farm*, but it seemed Heloise did not prefer these suggestions to the ones she was able to come up with. Kristin also reported that these curricular canons were “very, very dry;” Nils said educational videos were “boring as hell.” This aligns with Tyner’s attitude (1998): “The teacher who sticks with educational media at the expense of mass media passes up the opportunity to use engaging and culturally appropriate information resources that can contribute to learning” (p. 171). This ties in, too, with Buckingham’s dismissal of “canonical” materials, because teachers must respond to students’ interests.

#### 4. Research Question 2c

##### How is time a constraint against teaching media literacy?

It seemed one of the greatest hindrances against the varied and effective execution of media lesson plans was time. The always matter-of-fact Lauren called time (or “lack thereof”) “the giant nemesis in any classroom.” Some expressed the constraint of critiquing media because of the time needed to establish background knowledge. Eliza submitted,

The hardest part is these kids don't have the background knowledge that's needed to really understand the impact of the London Riots or the impact of Occupy Wall Street, or D.C. So you have to spend a day or two to build up background knowledge from them to really understand what's going on.

Others discussed the constraint of producing media for the time it took both students and teachers:

**Heloise:** There wasn't a lot of time to do projects, in terms of kids creating their own media...also, from a pragmatic respect, as an educator, we do have to grade and read and respond and when you have six classes of 35, it's almost 200 kids whose work you wanna actually give thought to.

**Ivy:** It would take a lot of instructional time to just teach them the expectations for doing things and how to accurately do things, you know? I don't want to wait. They don't have any time to waste.

The consensus here is that given time restrictions, teachers have bigger fish to fry, like Max, who is tasked with covering world history in *half* a year.

Multiple teachers expressed slightly exasperatedly all that they would do if they had more time in their fantasy worlds, thus making this part of narrative analysis quite rich with opportunity. In responding to how they would dedicate more time to their

students, teachers were able to engage all parts of the circuit of culture, a possibility they may not have with the bounds of class time.

**Alicia:** Maybe kind of learn that media is something that is mass-produced and how it's connected to economics, I guess. It's a multi-million dollar business. I mean, YouTube, it's huge, and it being, you know, on the stock market now, people get shares of it.

**Barbara:** I would probably dedicate it to journalism, I think. The new journalism that Tom Wolfe started. That appeals to students so much: the kind of journalism where the students can report on their school community life. Use surveys, then analyzing the results of that survey and then publishing it. And seeing—getting feedback on that, is the most engaging type of work a student can do. And rewarding.

**Frank:** If time permitted, more projects, student-generated projects of different ilks of media: some by computer, some by video, some by narrative, some by live interviews.

In all of these cases, teachers would employ a strategy of critical media literacy, but they feel that they cannot, so the interviews absolutely support the constraint detailed in the literature.

Nevertheless, some teachers didn't want more time. Eliza reported that her school day goes from 7:30 to 4:10: "I don't know how there can be much more time in the day." Jamila mentioned all the time she dedicates to time at school and performing teacher's tasks outside of school leaves her with less time with her family, so she cannot imagine adding instructional time.

## 5. Research Question 2d

### What types of materials and resources do teachers report using in order to teach media literacy?

One set of answers that was highly contingent on the communities in which teachers worked was the availability of materials, educational technologies, and in some cases, need to procure instructional technologies on their own dime. All five who worked in inner city schools lamented lack of access to instructional technology, books, and even paper on which to make dittos, probably the most rudimentary form of educational technology still in use today.

On the other hand, in response to my question of whether or not their school had a media specialist<sup>16</sup>, a few teachers who had worked in suburban schools for their whole careers quickly responded almost quizzically that their school had two or more. Alicia, who had worked in an underfunded school and now worked at a quite well-funded school, says that mandated implementation of media literacy would leave some schools at a “disadvantage, because they may not have the access to the levels of media necessarily needed to be able to fulfill the requirements of the curriculum.”

Some teachers were very interested in using the media specialists or librarians as resources to enact media literacy in their classrooms.

**Alicia:** I'd probably link up with [our media specialist] first and see what materials are already available in the media center, because they have a boatload

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<sup>16</sup> A media specialist can be defined as a educational professional who uses multimedia equipment to help teachers make classes, presentations, and lectures more accessible. Like librarians, they help teachers choose and locate audiovisual and digital aids; degrees in library sciences degrees nowadays include training in multimedia archiving.

of books, a boatload of videos, DVDs, things like that, that schools invest a lot of money in...

**Eliza:** One our staff, she's like the technology/media point person. She is really amazing with sharing websites, like Edmoto and Glogster, and all of these project-based, student-based social networking sites.

**Frank:** We've very fortunate, we had a very, very good media specialist. She's very proactive and I worked very closely with her on a different, wide variety of projects... She would give me specific examples of how it would advance student learning.

To boot, Max really liked his instructional support teacher. Kristin, also in an inner-city school, said that her school had instructional coaches whose job was to help locate resources for the class, but that they offered “zero support” in terms of what their job description indicates, so the data show a lot of variance in the quality of resources that give teachers a hand with media lessons.

After saying that the school district would provide her with “absolutely anything [she wants]” in terms of technological resources, Deborah continues:

I mean we're short of money. We've cut teachers. Social studies lost one two years ago and lost one this year, and there's rumor that we might lose...so our classes are growing. Which is much more difficult because you can't connect with each individual kid as easily as you can with a smaller group, I mean, just it's that much harder. But I don't know where the money's coming from, but the technology is there.

Her narrative disconnect about sources of money and where they filter from can be hard to reconcile, but generally speaking, teachers are more expensive than equipment for the time and capital they contribute (equipment is usually one down payment, but teachers need to be paid thousands of dollars a month in salary and benefits). Deborah's uncertainty here matches with some concern in the literature that machines might be

replacing the need for teachers (Cuban, 2001). Some other teachers also brought up the fact that staff was being cut, even as student enrollment increased.

Although all teachers I interviewed were able to articulate a habituation to educational media, a few teachers who had a lot of access to educational media from their schools discussed that the willingness to use educational media was variable among their colleagues, some saying that they worked with some teachers who never used technology at all. Maybe as schools increase their technological budgets, and certainly as class sizes increase, there will be more of a sense of urgency not to take these materials for granted; it was an interesting narrative that surfaced, and one that some teachers in the less-funded schools might fume at.

In stark contrast to suburban county teachers stood teachers Heloise, Kristin, Max, and Nils whose schools often didn't have (functional) libraries or computer access. Heloise asserted that the school had on payroll a librarian who didn't seem to do anything (this school had no library), but she wouldn't quit since she was being paid. Heloise called this waste of resources “grossly offensive.”

Some inner-city teachers reported a compound restraint of being required to follow the materials in their mandated curriculum but *not* being provided with the materials, leading them to buy (or bootleg) them on their own. Heloise expostulates:

So they don't let me do the things that I want to do, and then they don't even have something that they do want me to do; they just gave me an hour a day—an hour a day with these kids and told me “You can't do x, y, and z.” And then didn't give me any affirmative things that I did. So that was difficult for me.

Sometimes, the schools offered a textbook, and that is about it in terms of interpreting a school curriculum. Some responses indicated that teachers frequently relied on them as

sources for other media (electronic and non), suggesting that those books can help set agendas for lessons, but they are far from the main material teachers are wedded to. Nils says, “I felt it my obligation and responsibility to go beyond the standard to provide a multiplicity of perspectives so they could then understand what they were being taught but not from just that one point of view.”

A few teachers in urban and suburban settings described their familiarity with grants they could apply for as teachers, so those particular participants did not express material disempowerment. On the other hand, like the Luddites Cuban described years before them (1986), several teachers in the inner-city schools expressed the constraint of the dysfunctionality of the tools themselves—sometimes the educational media were defective.

One thing I asked teachers about is how they assessed student explorations of media. All had different styles, methods and standards, and because of my relative unfamiliarity with assessment methods, I do not feel comfortable asserting that my analysis is especially rigorous, but the teachers' general assertions that aside from standardized tests, *they* were autonomous in their assessment design, and they all chose independent methods of analyzing success for their students. Many used rubrics.

## **6. Research Question 2e**

In what ways are teachers autonomous in their classroom pursuits of media literacy?

A few of my questions involved determining whether their administrations or coworkers had any influence on how they created lesson plans about media literacy. This

response varied. Interestingly, the literature at once criticized teachers' structural inability to do their jobs autonomously and assailed the lack of support that teachers get from the top down. Evidenced by my own research, the irony lay in the fact that those with more teaching autonomy tend to be critical of their administration's lack of support. While many schools don't have the resources to offer shared planning time or a helpful teaching coach, some teachers lamented the disruptive or conflicting presence of those opportunities or people.

Just as the teachers' perceptions of their administrations varied widely, so did their opportunities for collaboration with other faculty. Some teachers discussed professional learning communities, shared planning time, countywide web discussion boards, and great relationships with their teaching team. Some even used professional development or grading time to observe their colleagues' lessons.

Related to their time constraints, teachers revealed a desire *not* to “reinvent the wheel,” as Alicia and Nils put it. Though teachers often did not perceive instructional support from top-down sources, including administration, professional development, or their training, they “stole” lessons, organizational methods, assessment tools and even instructional styles from other teachers. This frequent metaphor is quite tongue-in-cheek, as the practice of observing an engaging lesson and shoehorning it into a different classroom context is never dissuaded. As Nils put it, “The modus operandi of teaching is to beg, borrow, and steal.”

Jamila viewed the structure of some professional development courses as wasteful, and that time would better be applied to working more closely with colleagues

on issues teachers see as emergent, instead of accepting the sometimes inapplicable lessons applied in a top-down way. Some interviewed expressed a similar resistance to the textbook's quality, version of events, or usefulness relative to the subject matter that they wanted to cover. Instead, they draw from various collaborative sources (typically the Internet or colleagues) to locate lesson materials.

Heloise, who did not hide that the faculty at her school offered absolutely no pedagogical inspiration, spent professional development time at another school in her district, one she describes as “public, but not *public*.” Research into this school shows that it is consistently ranked as one of the top 100 public schools in the country, and is, hands-down, considered the best public school in its region. She revealed that the children of the mayor of this major American city attended. This illustration shows not only the effort this teacher made to soak herself in the atmosphere of a successful school, but also a narrative of the disparity of public schools, even within one district, of the quality of teachers who can lead and inspire in their professional communities.

Finally, when I asked the question as to whether the administration supported them in any way in designing lessons, the majority responded that they were completely autonomous in this activity. It seems, then, as if Peter Greenaway’s comments to Kubey (1998) on lack of teacher autonomy were shortsighted.

## 7. Research Question 2f

### In what sense are teachers constrained by standardized testing and curricular goals?

Almost all participants in this study communicated negative attitudes toward standardized tests. Most of the negative views of the standardized tests were apolitical, however, unlike the elaborations in the literature about the problems of testing. Teachers mainly expressed disapproval that the paradigmatic multiple intelligences or critical thinking skills are not accessed in the taking of a forced-choice test. A negative disposition against testing appeared more antagonistically in the narratives of participants in this study in urban schools than in the narratives of the suburban teachers, all of whom worked in counties whose test scores ranked in the top tier of the United States; thus it can be interpreted that the test-driven pressures on suburban teachers may not be quite as menacing as they are for teachers in urban environments.

Quite a few participants reported using media as a secondary or supportive source merely as a way to hook students into the lesson, essentially because other aspects of the curricular objectives took precedence. To be sure, the study of media has long been merged into the curriculum (in Social Studies, for its role in affecting society vis-a-vis various historical events; in English, for its interpretive richness in learning rhetoric, genre, author's purpose, reliability, audience and bias), and all teachers spoke to this, but Ivy spoke of the fact that interacting with the media as she does in lessons is not a tested standard; as such, she perceives that if a teacher evaluator were to come in and observe a lesson about visual media, she might get somewhat negative feedback about it. Heloise

and Nils also reported being written up on technicalities by teacher evaluators, which they saw as absurd since they perceived their lessons as going exceptionally well.

A history teacher at an inner-city school in a major American city, Max discussed being “flung into” a challenging urban school right after he got his Master’s degree. As if that was not enough of a Herculean task, his own agency as a teacher was flung by the wayside due to the exclusive pressure he felt was to teach to the test. He was very critical of state-mandated content, especially of its almost complete irrelevance not only to his students' lives, but also to the lives of U.S. citizens, when much more appreciable information from governmental history was missing. The high school assessment that he taught “to”:

... [Was] all based on very narrow content, like knowing which Supreme Court case by name referred to which government principle. So they had to keep things like Mapp vs. Ohio separate from McCulloch vs. Maryland. These are cases that most adult college-educated Americans have never even heard of, without even just Brown vs. Board of Education [being included in the test materials]. We're talking about ones that are more obscure than that... They were all things that 99% of the students will probably never encounter again after that test. And it was just a big waste of time.

Max reasons out that this is not just restricted to this community or even city, but that standardized testing “mania” is a nationwide phenomenon.

At the beginning of our interview, when asked what *her* felt outcomes in a classroom were, Cassidy deferred first to the institution: “I mean, the main goal of the school's outcome is always to get them to pass the test,” following up with her more didactic goals of improving students' reading, critical thinking skills and personal enjoyment of reading and writing. This response set somewhat of a tone of submission to the system under which she works. It should be noted that despite this, Cassidy

demonstrated a high personal commitment to teaching and outstanding professional achievement. Even as a young teacher, she has served as a faculty team leader and countywide curricular planner and has earned national teaching credentials.

Similarly, before Heloise could describe her own goals, she offered an account of how “hemmed in” she was to the fabric of standardized testing, saying that her schools’ goals were narrowly focused on annual yearly progress so that the administration could measure the improvement of the school and anticipate further funding. Heloise also sounded off on her personal goal to engage critical thinking in her students, which she simply does not believe the benchmarks accurately measure. Later on, she described possibly the greatest degree of stricture of any of my interviewees in terms of the curriculum she taught, in the inner city: “There is planned curriculum that if you follow it, it's supposed to tell you what you're going to do every day. What quiz you're going to give, what story you're going to read, what vocabulary you're going to teach.” Ultimately, despite the curriculum's constraints, Heloise was able to finagle her version of learning into the classroom in some measure, despite feeling limited by the ability to bring in her own materials.

The idea of being watched over was also supported in other teachers' classrooms—English teachers would be nervous about having evaluators come in and see that their students didn't have either a book or pencils and paper in front of them, but were rather engaging in other forms of literacy. Max, even right after expressing how integral media are to both instruction and curriculum, says, “It’s not going to help them bubble the right choice on their multiple choice test as much.” This assertion reveals that

even as teachers see media literacy curriculum as a strong tool for critical thinking and engagement, they have internalized the need to focus on drilling the relatively simplistic multiple-choice assessments. Kristin, who had experience vetting standardized questions, shared a telling story about how when she was teaching practice tests, her students' critical-thinking skills transcended the nature of the test, thereby throwing its validity into question. "Which is funny," Kristin enjoins, "In that you've been teaching them all year, think critically! Think so deep! And now we need to make sure you're not over-thinking a question." This comment reflects a common thread in the literature of critical media literacy scholars: standardized testing is simply incompatible with the philosophies of critical media literacy.

Ivy described one of her main instructional goals was to get students to work together cooperatively, expressing a Deweyan sentiment (and echoing the needs of Jenkins' participatory culture):

I want them to ask each other questions and challenge each others' thinking. That takes a lot because they don't work together that well. I think it's because the culture has been a testing culture for so long that no one has fostered group work or collaboration, so getting them to speak and question one another is a difficult thing, but that's usually my goal.

Her interpretation of why her students might not work together well illustrates, perhaps all too disturbingly, that standardized testing disempowers youth from learning from their social interactions. Kristin, too, regards standardized test taking as destructive to students' creativity and interaction with their words and future worlds. Here, she exposes a narrative of her previous year's teaching in one of the well-funded districts, where she says her third graders often read at the same level as some of her current eighth graders:

When I got to Christmas that year... my third graders still had brand new crayons that they had never used... it made me stop and think. Is this the kind of teaching that I want to do? [The county she previously taught in] is known as the highest ranking county in the country a lot of the times for test scores. But are those test scores really making well-rounded thinkers who we want to turn our government or our society over to in 20 years?

Interestingly, the standardized testing paradigm for students, as unsavory as it was to teachers, was an efficient tool for them to track progress. Some teachers indicated that they followed classroom assessment data very closely to help them determine (or “map,” in Tyner’s words [1998]) what skills they were in need of reinforcing, and the idea of following quantitative data is certainly considered a best practice for teachers. Because these data follow an entire population of students, they can help in creating consensus, or finding a stable center from which a teacher can work effectively. It seems unlikely that teachers would be entirely motivated by data-tracking, because teaching is more of an art than a science, but anchoring in this strategy exists as a constraint for critical pedagogues. For those committed to the project of critical media literacy, data-tracking would be anathema merely in its epistemology. However, for the teachers, a lack of standard skills was not so much used against the students, but against the teachers themselves. To assure the security of their position, data are something that *have* to drive teachers in schools.

## **8. Research Question 2g**

How have teachers’ pre-service and professional learning environments affected their applications of media literacy?

In asking questions that delved so deeply in a past that was sometimes perceived as irrelevant, I was asking for trouble when it came to coding and analysis. My question,

very specifically, asked for any recollection of media study in their pre-service teacher training. In some cases, respondents had no recollection whatsoever. Some discussed classes on integrating technology in the classroom as an instructional aid, and some talked about classes on file management. Some laughed at the idea that whatever about media came up in the many years since they had attended their schools, has been dramatically revolutionized since the advent of Web 2.0 and the rise of social networking. Jamila even noted that one class offered “was something about integrating media. But I think about it now and I have to laugh because for my final product was a slideshow. Like literally using slides.” Responses generally indicated that traditional literacy was a priority in their training. Further, in terms of “media,” the literature might define what these teacher's colleges taught as more technological literacy than media literacy. If so few teachers have discussed media literacy in their teacher's training, it can probably be reasonably inferred that *critical* media literacy as a pedagogical commitment is something that they would have to come to on their own, if at all.

Nils, however, believed his concept of media literacy was more “nuanced” because of his involvement as a onetime media practitioner (not to mention a doctoral candidacy in media studies). He believes that Schools of Education could do more to expose future teachers to “the critical component of understanding [media], being able to use it, knowing how it's created, as well as understanding the impact and effects of it.”

Eliza's assessment of her teacher education program speculates as to why a course on media literacy might not work:

I think the graduate school that I went to may not have seen the importance of media, or really seen it as a credible source of information because it changes all

the time... How do you teach something that's always changing? How do you make that a course with a syllabus?

When it came to professional development, Eliza took it upon herself to do a free training in Adobe so that she could run a unit on creating media. In fact, tutorials online are becoming completely openly sourced so that there exists less and less of a financial restraint on teachers, as Kubey noted (1998).

So, too, did Jamila bring up an interesting narrative while discussing whether she used creative projects. It revealed some tenseness about her role as an educator and the expectations of high skill level with multimedia projects.

There's a difference between having a teacher use [media] in their classroom, because it's easy for me to access anything, I'm computer literate—I'm not an expert, but I'm not afraid of it—but for me to teach students how to use something, that puts me in a different role: I have to be an expert. I have to know how to do all these programs.

She continued that when she enlisted the help of media specialists, it was clear that her class objectives and the media specialist's objectives came into some conflict: she wanted students to use the software to demonstrate content knowledge, and the media specialists were more focused on making students skilled editors in iMovie. I bring Jamila's concerns into the category of restraints on teacher education because I firmly believe that with technological demands already expected of teachers (inside *and* outside of the classroom), it is unfortunate that schools do not also expose teachers more to the creative potential of electronic media, and the fact that it can coalesce well with curricular content objectives, provided that the teacher has efficacy in the use of electronic media.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> A lot of the Adobe tutorial workshops, for example, require only a few hours of practice before users gain proficiency with its software.

Nils's interview was an invaluable contribution to data. Before he began teaching, he was a media practitioner and could thus contribute his expertise to his elective class on journalism and media. In the opinion of a majority of the participants, media literacy should have more of a presence in the curriculum, whether it is incorporated more across the board, introduced as a unit, introduced as an elective, or introduced as a requirement. Although, as Nils says, "So much depends on the teacher," referring to the content knowledge and approach of the instructor being contingent on the success of a class.

### **9. Research Question 3**

To what extent is critical media literacy applied by middle and secondary school teachers?

In every case, participating teachers had engaged with critical media literacy, even unconsciously, as Tyner (1998) asserted. Some spoke more explicitly to their alignment with critical pedagogy in the operation of their classrooms.<sup>18</sup> Some tenets of this pedagogy that enter their practice include student-centeredness, understanding their taught communities, frequent dialogue and commitment to critical thinking, deconstruction of corporate hegemony, and empowerment of knowledge through creation.

As for student-centeredness, one pedagogical strategy that quite a few teachers mentioned was accessing prior or background knowledge. This practice ensures that more

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<sup>18</sup> Though no teacher explicitly posited that Freire had influenced their teaching philosophies, this could be because I never posed the question of who their most influential pedagogues were.

students will participate because they are more attentive to “words” they are empowered by, and the relationship that the teacher creates for the classroom is one of knowledge sharing, instead of being the acknowledged “expert.” This bring them to deeper engagement and understanding of the topic:

**Eliza:** [I start by finding] engaging [materials], maybe not even engaging to me, but something I know would be engaging to 14- or 15-year-olds and starting with that.

**Ivy:** We started talking today, we just compared and contrasted the Gettysburg Address to the 'I have a dream' speech. And they brought up Trayvon [Martin], that kid Trayvon. So they want to read about that tomorrow, so it's really what happens in the classroom. It's not where I start but it's where I end up.

These expressions line up well with Buckingham’s assertion (1998) that “...We need to pay much closer attention to what children already know, rather than assuming that they know nothing, or that what they know is somehow invalid or ideological.” (p. 38).

On top of respecting the students’ spheres of knowledge, Many teachers deferred to students' new literacies, thereby admitting that they were not sole experts in the class:

**Deborah:** If I have a problem with my laptop, I don't have to call the IT guy, I say, “OK! Who can solve this?” Anything... they solve my problems for me. They're very good.

**Frank:** I would often go to the students themselves for support in a lot of media literacy and computer literacy things but I never had any reservations about doing that...It's good for the students that the teacher's still learning, and a good teacher should always continue to learn.

**Kristin:** They know more than I do a lot of times about how to make a great media presentation and so I would let them kind of guide the process and in that process of them getting it, they're learning that I don't have to be the controlling person in the classroom.

After explaining that his students were better abreast of the news than he expected, Max told me that as he was teaching about the North Korean War, his students piped in about Kim Jong Il. “Didn't that guy just die? I'm like, 'I don't think so!' 'Well, yeah, just yesterday we saw it on the news.' Then like, 'Well, I didn't see the news yesterday, I was busy lesson-planning! Let me check! Huh, you're right!’” This parallels some of George's comments of how glued some of his students were to Twitter and that they often became the news purveyors in the classroom. These narratives demonstrate that students are still very much followers of journalism, even as their chosen news media have become more digitized.

Several teachers spoke to the fact that they are happy to incorporate more contemporary pop culture in their classrooms when students challenge them about their own “fuddy-duddy” media use. Deborah described her use of music as a way to hook students, and when students complained about her music choices (Richard Wagner, Elvis Presley), they were encouraged to bring their own choices (Norah Jones, Adele, Jimmy Buffett) to class to fit in with the lesson's theme.

Heloise mirrors this in her classroom goal to “use a lot of pop culture references and things like that with the kids. I always tried to be on their level.” Even though she was required to follow a stringent scope and sequence in her district, she resisted by teaching materials that she knew her students would love, including *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho and *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold. These examples of outstanding contemporary literature really connected with students (although she felt as if she was being watched). Nils echoed this: “I guess one of my skills is that I can take a subject

that's boring as hell that most students don't feel is relevant to their lives at all, and I can come up with a way to make it relevant.”

Similarly, when students brought a news item mainly propagated by social networking to Eliza's attention, she engaged in a “weeklong spur-of-the-moment lesson on the #Kony2012 scandal,” which was at the forefront of her mind in our interview, since she had just wrapped the lesson up. The quotation below is a synthesis of her discussion of it at three different times during the interview.

We did a whole thing on #Kony2012 when it first came out. We watched it, we talked about it, and then a week later, we watched the downfall of the main guy and how he went crazy, and we talked about trusting your author. We talked about different implications it could have. After we kind of talked about the author's motivation, the kids were like “Oh, I totally should have looked into that more before I liked it on Facebook or before I bought the package or before I made this petition.” So they felt silly afterwards but I twisted it into a learning experience... They were flabbergasted, “I can't believe we listened to that without doing more research! I can't believe I bought this twenty dollar kit! I don't even want to support this cause anymore...” And they were embarrassed that they had been, this one student said, “swindled.”

Though the news discourse surrounding #Kony2012 was successful at delegitimizing the leaders of Invisible Children, and students were able to follow and recognize the need for media criticism, it is unfortunate that the scandal shut off a world to Eliza's students that they felt passionate about, and that does indeed deserve media attention. Kristin also discussed the scandal in her class, and because the students read similarly into the failure and propagandism of Invisible Children's leaders, she offered books to her students that would teach them about child soldiers in Africa. They proceeded to make important connections. After initially saying that the information had no relationship to their lives and society, Kristin says,

They stopped and thought about it. Well there's not [that kind of] violence, but there is violence in our neighborhoods and we're being held back, but maybe not quite in the same “dictator” way. They were able to make connections to their own lives.

Both Eliza and Kristin spent lots of time in the classroom discussing #Kony2012 because it was a student-centered activity, but it seemed that due to their different learning objectives, their gatekeeping role or framing of the issue was different in each case. As Kellner and Share (2005) impart, “Teachers must be sensitive in criticizing artifacts and perceptions that students hold dear yet an atmosphere of critical respect for difference and inquiry into the nature and effects of media culture should be promoted” (p. 373).

Frank, a retired teacher with 32 years of service, iterates a few times throughout the interview that he's always seen himself as student-centered, and still does, as a volunteer and substitute in the same school system where he cut his teeth. Not only is he passionately dedicated to this role, but he had an entire marking period wherein *students* taught the lessons:

We had this formula and we would say to them, you know, “Hey! You tell us you don't want to sit there and be bored, well then you don't bore the rest of your class when you teach! You know you need to have a little bit of this a little bit of that a little bit of didactic time, and a little bit of media literacy time or whatever, a little bit of experiential time, a little bit of evaluation time, you need to keep it moving, you need to keep it interesting, you need to keep it accountable and it needs to be relevant.”

Frank's examples always deeply reflected his commitment to the types of learning Dewey or Vygotsky called central to the student's universe, but of all the teachers I interviewed, Kristin relayed the deepest commitment to Freirean principles (though she said she draws

on Jean Piaget's constructivism for her teaching style)<sup>19</sup>. Here is a sampling of her narrative that connects with Freire's critical pedagogy:

- I normally spend the first few weeks on hopes and dreams...because if we're not taking any of these into account, what we're doing isn't going to be relevant to you.
- I put aside a good 30 minutes for... ideas where the kids can share and produce in whatever way they feel is best going to get across their message...whether I want to draw it, talk it, write a poem, make a video of myself.
- People say I'm nuts to let a kid use my 1,200 dollar MacBook to look up something; I'm just like, "What else are they going to use?"

Teachers have learned that after focusing on students, they have to focus on the students' community "worlds." Heloise perceived that that's what one of the schools she worked in accomplished, although neither school she worked in was adequately funded or had a very high rate of engagement among students. The appraisal of the school itself as a center for "real learning" was marked between these two schools:

I think that was the big difference that I felt between my schools, is that even though they had a lot of the same problems, at one school, the kids were treated like delinquents and everything was hopeless, whereas in my second school, the kids were treated as people who needed a lot. And the school was treated as a place that was troubled but had hope to improve.

The formulation here lies close to Freire's humanization of those who interact with their circumstances to become "free." As vague as some of Freire's rhetoric is according to some in the literature, Heloise manages to capture a perfect example of how Freire's hope can begin to empower a community. Nils achieved this as well with a multimedia assignment about representing his students' neighborhoods:

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<sup>19</sup> Tyner (1998) mentions: "A constructivist approach opens the opportunity to teach students critical thinking skills through dialectic, ideologic, and discursive techniques" (p. 164).

I would have them go out into their neighborhood ... some very run down neighborhoods. They had to document some aspect of urbanization within their own environment so a lot of them would take photographs or they would go out and take videos. So in a few [cases] they had access to a video camera or something to that effect.

Eliza offers an elective class called “Global Media.” Its goal is to help students relate and understand current events in other countries. While some teachers bemoaned their students' apathy towards international news, Eliza's elective class was structured to relate students' worlds with the greater world outside saying students recognized the sentiments of domestic and foreign “revolutions and how there are a lot of commonalities between people who may seem very different.”

George is also interested in turning students' ideas of social media from narrow and egocentric to a tool for wider communication. By first harnessing the “individualist” public sphere that Twitter carries for them, he can bridge into conversations about how social media can be more meaningful in their lived communities. Wyatt and Silva (2007) say that this type of student discourse can lead to worldlier, more decentered views about their lived communities, ultimately helping students deflect the status quo opinions of society.

Expanding on Kristin's student-centeredness was the way her lessons led to a deeper intellectual investment into students' communities. Describing some transformative classroom discussions, Kristin reveals:

“Maybe I thought I wanted to be a lawyer but maybe I want to now be in law but a child advocate. Or maybe I want to be a doctor, but instead of like the high-paid plastic surgeon, maybe I want to be an emergency doctor or somebody who works with low-income patients.” A lot of what I try to do is teach the students how to give back to their community. Yes, for a lot of them, the ultimate achievement where they live is to make it out, but even if they make it out, I feel like they need

to know that they need to give back to where they came from so that other students can make it out also.

The end of this narrative certainly creates a little bit of dissonance with the idea of community empowerment when the communities are viewed in deficit terms, for critical pedagogues might want to see that learning experience is so transformative that there would be no need to “make it out of” disenfranchised communities. However, it is clear that Kristin sees her role in the class as one of directing students as individuals away from the abject fatalism of their roles as community citizens. Later in the interview, but an earlier establishment to her narrative, she added that while earning her Masters and National Board Certification, that she did not just learn about traditional literacy, but *community* literacy, or bringing educational buy-in from communities.

Perhaps the most exciting narratives I was able to elicit in my interviews were details about lessons that were eminently “stealable.” Each teacher had very creative ideas about how to implement media content, and some had ideas that represented critical pedagogy really well, though not always critical media literacy. Max describes one such lesson. He was prompted to do so by the state test's unconscionable inadequacy in accessing relevant information about U.S. citizenship to address a real issue in his students' “jurisdiction”:

I forced myself to make time to do a three-day mock trial activity. It had absolutely nothing to do with anything that was on the test... There's hardly anything about criminal law anywhere in that year-long government class. Which is kind of crazy, because that's the one area of government that a large number of my students have had lots of contact with, whether it's as themselves, or a family member or friend, they've all had some encounter with the law. And understanding how criminal law works is a lot more relevant to them than some of the more obscure things that they'd been tested on. So I did this mock trial and they did great with it and they loved it... And that's what they remember from that

year when they came back to me the next year and said, “You know, man, your class was so boring! Only thing that we did that was fun was that mock trial! That was great! The rest of it sucked!”

Max is addressing something that Goodman (2003) had discussed, saying that students must develop their knowledge according to the language of their worlds, “including their treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system...” (p. 31).

Class discussion is central to these teachers' classrooms, and all used it every day (barring test days and the like). This is a strategy teachers use to access the multiple intelligences or learning styles of all students; to them it is not an option, and to many, discussion of media leads to rich and very personal discussions for the students. The strategy exists to get students engaged, but a goal that some teachers had was to discuss to enact synthesis of their prior knowledge and to cement curricular concepts. Some teachers say they struggle to keep these discussions on task, so they act as guides or facilitators of the discussion. Discussing media made students even more enthusiastic.

**Deborah:** More interested, they're vocal, they're reflecting, they're disagreeing with each other, they're working together to try to understand.

**Ivy:** When they get really, really interested in something like [the Trayvon Martin case], you've got to go with it, because it doesn't happen all that often.

**Lauren:** When I'm introducing a new concept or new information or whatever, [I tie] it in somehow, relating it to something, tapping into something that they already know about. It seems to make it a little less scary.

Teachers use discussions to engage students on a narrative or rhetorical level, to synthesize writing or dialogue, and expectantly have them connect with the lesson on a

personal level. They often use the oldest critical pedagogy in the book, the Socratic method, for this.

**Eliza:** You have to spend some time making it a safe classroom environment so people feel comfortable taking risks... I would probably do a lot of the guided discussion and maybe keep it lighthearted, keep it funny, get to know the kids, get to know their personalities. If it were the end of the year, I see it more being a student-led, Socratic, seminar-esque type of lesson.

**George:** I think that's the cool thing about English—and not to say you don't learn about life in chemistry or math, you certainly do—but a lot of the conversations we have in my classroom are more personal... Talking about things is really, really important, and I think a lot of kind of inclusions can come from that.

**Max:** The more controversial it is, the more interesting it is. So you gotta be careful that in school they could backfire or it could get ugly. But you need a little bit of controversy to spark your discussion.

**Nils:** It wasn't sufficient for me to tell someone something to get them to agree with me and just to memorize it because I said it. I always wanted to ask questions that got them to kind of question their own perspectives and their own beliefs.

Discussions about media, participants reported, tended to be passionate, rich, and often controversial; some teachers spoke of having to step in from time to time to redirect, but all were excited to see how lit up their students get when the topic really related to them with current events and pop culture. Barbara knew a discussion was successful when students

[carried] the discussion beyond the four walls. So they leave my classroom still talking about it, [or] if in 2 days [when we reconvene] they come back into my classroom still talking about it or still bringing it up in lessons, I know I will have succeeded.

When students assimilated information that impassioned them to continue discussions, teachers sense that they have seen the success of critical thinking about the media, but are

not necessarily totally concerned about a holistic media awareness that cultural studies proponents such as Du Gay (1997) and Hall (1974) promote.

A few teachers went into how political sentiments entered their classroom, but unlike Freire, they held fast to the principled need for a teacher's neutrality in their classrooms. I feel limited in interpreting this, because I did not perform a study on a teacher's political affiliation and representation in the classroom, nor did I ask anything in my interview guide remotely attuned to a teacher's political orientation. I suspect that it is the school culture that tempts teachers away from political activism in their classes, but Max admitted that though he tried to leave his bias out, "That's not always possible." Lewis and Jhally (1998) would concur.

Still and all, these ways of bringing dialogue into the class was always framed in the school and teacher's form of content learning, so strictly speaking, conversations that weren't guided by the teacher or that didn't relate to the material were not considered appropriate for the classroom. Max couches it a little bit more in this paradigm of objectivity: "It's not just them saying what they think: I want them to, but they should actually show evidence of having thought about it themselves and used their own background knowledge."

Nils reflects on how he had to shift his teaching style to "be more himself" in a class in order to get buy-in, another tenet that Freire would promote. When Nils first entered teaching, he felt as if he had to be oppositional and tough in order to prove to his students that he shouldn't be trifled with.

I was in a constant series of battles with students. And I quickly learned that every time you get into a conflict in the classroom with a student, trying to assert your

own authority, you lose. And the primary point to that is that even if you as the teacher get the last say, which you always do... you lose standing in front of the rest of the class, because the rest of them see what buttons can be pushed... So that first year, I was just constantly doing lots of yelling and sort of trying to create this environment where it's like, "Follow my rules!" And it wasn't my personality.

Not only does this example underscore the need expressed in critical media literacy literature for teachers' validation of students, but that this narrative of teacher transformation is also no less vital to the potential of critical pedagogy than for that of students.

Some teachers reported discussing the question of media's cultural or corporate hegemony:

**Cassidy:** They get very critical when they start realizing that companies are actually targeting them and trying to persuade them to do something or buy certain products, and they start critically thinking about it. I think it kind of stirs a lot of emotions within them.

**Eliza:** The book version of *The House of Spirits* [by Isabel Allende] had a lot more magical realism, and all of the characters were from Argentina or Chile, whereas the movie was mainly white actors—no magical realism and a lot more romantic than the book so we talked about the differences, why Hollywood would make it that way versus how it was intended to be by the author.

**Ivy:** We ripped apart advertisements with the ninth grade. That was great. Just watching them figure out how they're being manipulated and what commercials and figure that stuff out because they'd never thought about it before. And then once they start thinking about it, they second guess everything they see and it's fun to be a part of.

**Max:** [Advertising] is something that I talk about with my economics students, especially. Like, how advertising can actually create demand. It can convince consumers that they need something that they didn't think they needed before they saw the ad.

Nils had a chance to discuss one of his class buy-in lectures that he used at the beginning of the term for all of his journalism classes. Very interested in looking at news

discursively, Nils described showing a series of news photographs from 9/11 to have students synthesize ideas on ethical reasons why no newspaper ran the “most famous photograph no one has ever seen.”<sup>20</sup> After discussing ethics, aesthetics, and author’s background for a while, he shows students the photograph as it would run in a newspaper, propped up against an ad for Macy’s. In doing so, he enables his students to see likely the real reason the disturbing photo was not run by U.S. newspapers: the news media does not want to upset advertisers: “A good portion of the decision-making process isn’t just about the moral or ethical potential issues but... making sure that you’re not going to want to upset your advertisers, so there’s that sort of monetized issue as well,” Nils discussed. This lesson seems to have addressed all of Scheibe’s media literacy questions (2004).

As per the literature, discussing advertisements in class is a popular topic for English Language Arts teachers. In regards to my participants’ common narrative, most time was spent on the identity (or individual reading) in the circuit and not the organizational meanings of the advertisement accounted for in representation, production, regulation, and consumption. Nils hinted at it, and Jamila, too: “Advertising really stands out to me as a place where we spend a lot of money in this society and kids are maybe sort of ignorant to how influenced they are by it.” The participants who did extensive lessons on advertising all seemed to enjoy getting students to think critically about advertising, and all seemed to accomplish what Hobbs (2007) described: “Advertising messages ... can be used to help students recognize how authors express specific values

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<sup>20</sup> Nils refers particularly to “The Falling Man.” The photo, taken by noted photographer Richard Drew at the Associated Press, portrays a man jumping from a World Trade Center tower to his death.

and points of view through implied (not explicit) formulation of argument, thus strengthening inference-making skills” (p. 128).

All teachers, when they had the opportunity, were interested in drawing students’ attention with creative activities, because these projects boosted overall engagement and because it gave students an opportunity to show off their knowledge and interpretation of course content, maybe especially when they were not strong test-takers, writers, or participants in class discussion (the other most common forms of assessment that teachers use). Not only does Alicia have students who use media to create things, she enthusiastically describes them as artistic. “They like to see their work displayed.” She also indicated that her school's media specialist holds onto outstanding creative projects for future additions to media carts. Jenkins, et al (2009) would praise this, because the school supports the idea that students engage more by sharing their ideas with the larger community and can face the consequences of their creations.

Eliza is teaching her ninth graders how to create documentaries with Adobe Suite. She reports that about 75% are “soaring” with it, but some are “just totally struggling.” Eliza is effusive in offering support with one-on-ones, tutorials, checklists and step-by-step troubleshooting materials to her students, but similar to Masterman (1985), her goal is to teach self-reliance: “I'd hope to get some autonomy out of them.”

Frank, in his middle school world cultures class, had students write letters and create videos for an exchange of “worlds” with a school in Japan. “Because we know pieces of that culture, and they knew pieces of our culture, it was sort of like a wedding of the wheel, so to speak. It usually would be of a Socratic nature.” Frank, like Dewey,

was interested in offering lessons that were experiential in nature, because students responded well to that; however, by using dialogue and situating students between members of such vastly different communities, he was also enacting a Freirean pedagogy.

Nils, who worked in a district with students in lower economic brackets, saw that there was a variability of access his students had to electronic devices to capture creativity, and although he encouraged the use of electronics in creative projects because it helped them practice tech savvy for their professional futures, he didn't privilege these forms and was happy for students to create on “low budgets.” Here, he describes a lesson that cleverly bridged history with job hunting:

One of the activities that I came up with was I would show my résumé on the overhead and discuss the different parts to my résumé... And then they would do a reading about Napoleon and they had to fill out his résumé. At the end, we'd have then a discussion and then a hiring committee, and we'd decide whether or not we'd hire him. Then I'd tell them other things that weren't on his accomplishments, much like you wouldn't know about what would be on everybody's you know real life...résumés. And so they ended up in that whole activity, not only do they get like this one page study guide with all this information about him that they also have to wade through, because they could look at all his accomplishments, but they had to determine what kind of skills he might have had to have to do that. So at the end they had this one page thing that was a great study guide, but in addition to that, they learned a real world skill [of] how to make résumés, what goes on a résumé, how to hire people, the problems with hiring...So I gave them sort of the skills and the encouragement to think of [the subject]... beyond the classroom.

A way that several teachers described this creative “production” is by using a rather loaded term for critical pedagogues (emphases mine):

**Cassidy:** If they're creating their own products, they're going to have more *ownership* over it.

**Eliza:** I'm very structured but also allow students to have enough creativity where they feel *ownership* over their work.

**Frank:** Part of the [creative project] would always include parental input. Just so the parents a) were aware of what was going on and b) were able to be a part of it and took more *ownership* with it.

This metaphorical construction of being creative but being “owners” is cast in the Modern legacy of individualism. The literature insists that there has been a shift in this perspective, and that it will continue as the participatory culture emerges as Jenkins et al (2009) predict. All told, teachers expressed hope and pride in their students’ creative powers, and take for granted, as Koltay (2011) does, that students are active in content creation in and out of classrooms. Ownership, after all, is also a catchword in Freire’s terms of having transformative experience by way of wresting and “owning” knowledge.

Not only do teachers try to empower students with creative projects, but also by including students in the assessment process. A couple of teachers mentioned that they developed assessment tools with their students. Frank would ask them, “How do you think a fair evaluative process would look?” Kristin develops rubrics with them, saying that having them set their own goals as a group always pushes them harder to succeed.

Though outside of the strict framework for critical pedagogy, a cardinal goal for schools, parents, and certainly the participating teachers was that their students be prepared for what comes after high school. College and workforce-preparedness are not ends in themselves for pedagogues who practice critical media literacy, and grooming adolescents for the marketplace is certainly antithetical to them. However, college is an end expectation of the American educational “world,” especially for students located in the suburbs. Teachers with experience in inner-city schools also expressed a hope that their students would transcend their impoverished situations, and sensed that they could

empower students to do so. It would be useful to compare how a sampling of teachers in these divergent spaces describe these goals:

**Barbara (suburban):** I want them to learn not just the curriculum. But I also tell them that I am preparing them for college so that they'll be college-ready by the time they leave me, since I deal primarily with seniors. And I also tell them I'm preparing them for life.

**Frank (suburban):** In a broad sense, to maximize their growth, and that would be both in the personal arena and professional arena.

**Ivy (urban):** And also talk about colleges at the same time, which we're always trying to put in their ear.

**Max (urban):** I want students to leave with some skills that they're going to be able to use in life outside of a classroom, that they'll be better prepared for the world, better prepared for work, for college, for being an active citizen.

As mentioned in the literature (Kellner & Share, 2007; Tyner, 1998), the so-called “hierarchy of needs” for students in these socioeconomically contrastive schools is quite different. Barbara, who once taught in a poorer school, said that there, “We were just to get through the curriculum. I don't think media literacy was a term back in 1991. Or at least it wasn't for us in our *world* at [that] high school,” (emphasis mine). All teachers who mentioned college in their interviews seemed to assume it was an achievable goal for their students, even if at other points they admitted what a struggle students had with even very scaffolded learning. This shows that teachers, perhaps in their position of privilege (the vast majority of the participants reported earning a Master's degree or higher), are optimistic in the face of students' learning realities.

## 10. Emergent Data

During my interviews, several ideas about constraints and the problems or irrelevancy of critical media literacy were made manifest. Among them were the perspectives of teachers on source reliability, the constraints of the participation gap that teachers do not have many tools to overcome, the problem of class size, the resistance to reform, ambivalence (as opposed to clear disdain) toward media, and a sense of disempowerment about teachers' influence in the course of their pedagogical practices.

One thing that might restrict the students' framework of "reliable" media is the source of some media that teachers engage them with. The most peripheral news source that teachers mentioned incorporating into their lessons was Al-Jazeera, but none mentioned incorporating independent or alternative media, as Kellner and Share (2005) would recommend. This is not to say that teachers were not consistent in their process of teaching students how to evaluate sources, but that they seem to have internalized society's view of *factual* journalistic sources. Some which were named were, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, FOX News, C-SPAN, CNN, PBS, the History Channel, Discovery, and NPR. Interestingly, Eliza reported showing TMZ, a celebrity gossip site, to watch the #Kony2012 scandal unfold. While corporately subsidized by AOL, TMZ is the source that is probably the least elitist and most approachable to her students.<sup>21</sup> Barbara also loves the interactive and innovative lectures that TED offers clips of.

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<sup>21</sup> While TMZ can be criticized for its pandering, it can also be seen as keenly dedicated to democratic investigative journalism.

**Alicia:** A lot of the times [I'll use YouTube] clips from the History Channel, you kinda *can't go wrong* with that. CNN. (My emphasis).

(Discussing the evaluation of sources) **Lauren:** Why would Wikipedia maybe not be the best choice always? Why would CNN maybe be a little bit better?

Teachers cannot be faulted for attempting to model the consumption of mainstream news, as this has historically been very influential in shaping the modern American concept of the educated citizen. Teachers are not primarily news gatekeepers, but they are knowledge gatekeepers, and they feel an obligation to social norms that have been relayed to them in order for them to believe that their students can successfully interact with that world. Current events in that world have been chiefly disseminated by the aforementioned news sources, but as Frechette (2002) would argue, perhaps teachers could do more to question the motives and values behind the visual text.

Some, however, were insistent on creating a dialectic by comparing the validity of news sources. Max says,

How would the source sound different if instead of watching CNN, maybe, or watching Al Jazeera or some other news source that has a different viewpoint? I would try to get students to read and analyze these sources with the goal of trying to understand not only what is this about but who is saying what, and read between the lines... Get them to think about, what is the truth? Is there one truth or are their different versions of the truth?

Similarly, Nils approaches the reliability of journalism in a different way: “[I] get them to understand how media is a construction...Rather than, 'This is journalism is describing what happened in reality.' It's sort of this mediated truth and mediated reality that's based on the decisions of the practitioners.

The apparent saturation of media in youths' lives can create assumptions in teachers about access. Alicia, a teacher in one of the best-funded school districts in the

country, designed an ingenious project for her World History class: based on their lesson on authoritarian governments, they would design Facebook pages for various tyrants in history, complete with friends lists, likes, and status updates. She reflected on her assumption of prior knowledge within her students, and its boundaries: namely, a recent immigrant from a country with limited resources. She describes,

But the only kid that didn't really—couldn't really do it was the Ethiopian kid, because he had no familiarity with Facebook. So we had to kind of sit with him, and kind of walk him through it, but, um, I just kind of went on the assumption that all the kids knew how to use it and that was a wrong assumption to make because he was the only one who did not have a firm grasp of it. I mean, he knew what Facebook was, but he didn't have his own Facebook page that he could kind of get the whole friends' list and clicking all the likes and unlikes, and all the things you do with Facebook. He didn't quite get it, but he did the best he could, I think.

Adding more evidence to the digital literacy gap was Eliza, who described students in her school who didn't have as much experience with technology as the average American suburban teenager:

I mean, it's interesting to see some of them can't hold down the mouse... If you can't use the laptop, like physically if you don't have the fine motor skills to use a laptop, you're not going to be successful in the world of media.

Especially in densely populated industrial regions in the United States, the issue of English Second Language students in integrated classrooms comes up as a major difficulty in accessing prior cultural knowledge. Nils also emphasized this, indicating no matter how hard he tried as a teacher to engage students with or without media, there were several that he felt he could not reach as well. As several voices in the literature might suggest, (Duncan, 2007; Jenkins, et al. 2009; Mehra, Merkel and Bishop, 2004), minority and lower income people use media in ways that do not necessarily jibe with the

paradigm that is constructed in the classroom for the purposes of the marketplace and the dominant class.

Another general constraint that surfaced, according to teachers, was class size. Several teachers remarked that with 35 to 45 students in a class, it was very difficult to keep a tranquil and focused environment, as Kennedy (2005) would say, and that they simply had to accept that there would be students with no buy-in (particularly because classes that big usually appear in districts without enough community resources for educational buy-in altogether). Combining the needs for dialogue, creativity, and student-centering becomes that much more challenging as the class gets more and more jam-packed, as Ivy illustrates, even shading the role she adopts as “crazy”:

You need to have some strong classroom management. You can't ever let them have too much control. They're also 8<sup>th</sup> graders—I'm not going to say, “Hey! Have fun!” and be cool with it. I'm kind of crazy: you can't stand without asking. I need to have a very controlled environment. Because there's 36 of them.

Ivy conflates the ideas of craziness with control here, revealing that while tight reins and rigid structure keeps the class sane, she feels those very rules are somewhat absurd.

A few teachers' narratives revealed their skepticism of how reform measures at their schools were “the same old story.” Jamila called this “cyclical.” Nils said:

I didn't drink the Koolaid, because it would get to the point where you would have to revamp everything every year. At some point you have to distance yourself from jumping on board hook, line and sinker to every new initiative that comes out that says that this is the Holy Grail of how teaching is the most effective.

Nils distances himself from this reform using various metaphors—cultish, nautical, and religious—of blind commitment to the discourse of school administration.

Teachers were often quite ambivalent about the presence of media in their students' lives. This was important to explore, because it problematizes the known range of approaches that teachers have in teaching critical media literacy, as illustrated by the Inoculationist/Technicist continuum. In their responses, teachers would often declare a negative or positive aspect of media and soon thereafter be able to articulate counterexamples or counterarguments to the assumptions of those declarations.

**Frank:** This generation has so much coming at them so fast, it's important for them to be able to cipher out things through a lens they can operate in... because they're just being bombarded with that... I want them to be prepared when they go out into the world not to be afraid of media....

**Jamila:** It's good that they know how to use it, and it's good that they see all the neat things that you can do with it, but it can be dangerous if you don't know the impact of what you're doing or don't know the impact that it has on you.

**Nils:** The online world that students have now is both the most brilliant thing and one of the worst things imaginable for youth.

The “brilliance” of media Nils mentions is qualified by knowing the types of images people experience growing up before they are prepared for them. This is where teachers often feel they must play a gatekeeping (or regulatory) role in the students’ lives, but also feel they must acknowledge and surrender to external cultural forces, because they cannot always regulate students’ lives.

One of the most interesting things to log was the metaphors teachers used to discuss media, on one hand, and their teaching, on the other. Similar to McLuhan's famous epigraph, teachers also tend to describe media in terms of its fluid invisibility, but often negative terms: “inundate,” “flood,” “wash over,” “drown.” Additionally, very interesting is the frequency of “banking” terms to describe teaching that turn up:

“maximize their growth” “diversify their portfolio” “calculate risk” “investing.” One of the most common in vivo codes I found myself jotting was “buy in:”—a term used frequently by teachers to describe the point they know they've gotten the students' rapt attention or trust. I don't think that these metaphors in the teaching discourse are going anywhere. Nor should they—the terms used above do not indicate “deposits” from the teacher's storehouse of knowledge into the impressionable brains of students, but rather, they indicate wise “investment” decisions of students into their worlds of education, consistent with the modern ethos of enterprise.

In one of these peripheral courses, one I did not seek out to research, but used a different paradigm for media critique, was Deborah's course on psychology. Deborah's class narrative about a lesson on advertising demonstrated advertisers' role as social psychologists. She was very adamant in saying that advertisers “try to motivate people to change their behavior, bottom line. To attend their college, buy their life insurance, buy their deoderant—whatever it is.” Deborah describes how her classroom instruction plays on students' engagement with media and what that says about their psychological needs, motivations, and personality. She used the example of engaging in class dialogue with a boy in her class “with some kind of outlandish tennis shoes”:

I asked him “Do you mind telling me what you paid for these?” “200 dollars.” And I said “200 dollars? Goodness! Those aren't even leather!” He said, “No, Mrs. They are foam posits.” Well, it was fabulous. I put this absolutely shocked look on my face and said, “You spent 200 dollars on a pair of shoes that weren't even leather but made out of foam? So let's talk about how much this actually costs to make!” ... You know and then I go with the girls in Abercrombie and Fitch 45 dollar T-Shirt that is maybe a dollar to make et cetera.

Why do we do this? And get them to realize that [their] motivation is to be accepted and esteemed amongst [their] peers and teenagers is the primary goal.

Certainly, the approach here does not strictly connect to the approach of a critical media literacy teacher. For example, in this lesson, *why* the shoes and shirts cost so little to produce was not problematized. This is because the learning objective was different, and that is the framework she must interact with. Also, even while agreeing with the snipe at consumerist habits, some voices in the critical media literacy literature might cringe at the teacher's seeming snipe at the student's choices. However, the student felt safe enough in the class environment to assert,

“I understand what the advertiser is doing, but I'm still,' the boy said, 'going to go out and spend 200 dollars on a pair of foam shoes, because it's worth it to me as an individual.' But they get to understand that they're 'wasting money' [Deborah's air quotes] on name brands.” ...[They say,] “This is where I am in my life.”

For critical pedagogues, this is evidence that classrooms are not entirely centered on the authority of teachers anymore, that students can have an affirmative say in how they express their worlds.

Jamila often revealed much insight in her ambivalence, especially when digging into educational issues at a more macro level, as with comments like: “The opportunity that [our country] offers every child is unheard of, but the trade-off is that, you know, we are kind of like factories!” Certainly, of all the teachers I interviewed, Jamila seemed to respond the most in the form of questions, and it is not just her strong sense of worldly knowledge that she imbued.<sup>22</sup> Confident, honest, critical and measured in her thinking, she also was the teacher who seemed most affected by the line of questions, and

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<sup>22</sup> I'm sure this lethal combination would win her a lot of money on *Jeopardy!*

sometimes seemed to show some doubt in their premises.<sup>23</sup> However, it was the tension in her reactions that made for very rich evidence of how strong an emblem for critical pedagogy she could really be, because the frame of her ideas for class discussion always seemed challenging and student-centered. She also focused on some of the issues that Torres and Mercado (2005) bring up:

With the media, it's not that cut and dry to me. That's a big question—what role do we want them to play? What role should they play? And how can we enforce them to be responsible? Knowing that they are a private, profit-oriented organization at this point? How can we make sure that the goals of the community are being held in high esteem, as opposed to just their profit-making goals? And there is, to me, never going to be a black and white there.

Teachers offered me really rich descriptions about the various ways they are or were highly efficacious and engaged teachers—in a sense, they would have to be to agree to participate in a study of this nature. One narrative I am quite disappointed to have to report on is a degree of self-blame that crept into some interviews, in response to how teachers had approached the media in their classrooms.

**Eliza:** It's probably my own fault for not spending much time keeping up on the news as I could.

**Heloise:** I didn't find that class was very successful which is something that really bothers me. I look back on it and I think maybe I didn't do as good a job as I could have.

In light of my decision to frame my research within a symbolic interactionist dialectic with critical pedagogy, I cannot underscore enough how impressive and articulate these teachers were in giving their word and describing their world as pedagogues. My view of

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<sup>23</sup> The circumstances of our interview left her waiting at the library for a while as I got extensively rerouted off of I-95, and when I got to our interview location, we had to wait for a quiet room at the library for a while; all the while, her husband and children were suffering or recovering from an illness at home.

this scarce but extremely meaningful dubiousness of effectiveness, given the teacher's extraordinary set of pressures, however, is more influenced by critical theorists than anything else: I see the dominant ideology interpellating “subjects” into a sense of submission—the victim of circumstances is conditioned to blame him or herself.

For the capstone of this analysis, I want to reiterate that this analysis revealed a rich world of the teachers' senses of educational justice, if only revealed in their “utopias.” Some were optimistic that structural change could happen. Heloise, who had switched career orientation after her two year experience with Teach for America, offered a rich narrative of what schools could be like to balance themselves to the needs of traditional literacy and to the spirit of student-centeredness.

**Heloise:** So my fantasy would have been a longer school day where you have two English periods and the first part of the day could be your more traditional class. We're reading the text, we're writing the text and the second part could be like a more themed class that would be you know more creative, more based on new media or film or computers—would have been neat if we'd had them. Yeah, so I think that would be great if you could have not just the traditional kind of English class. I think that kind of instruction is important, you know, kids need to be able to read a passage and answer questions about it, standardized testing is important and will follow them for the rest of their lives, and if you're working at a regular job, that kind of reading comprehension is important. But the other stuff matters too. I would have loved something like that. And recess. They need “gym.”

**Principal Investigator:** They didn't have that either?

**Heloise:** No! There's nowhere for the kids to play and kids need to play. Even when they're in high school, you know, they need vigorous exercise and nutritious meals and free time and study time. Our whole mode of how schools work I just think is outdated. We don't live in an agrarian society in which we need to go home and help with the chores and be free over the summer to harvest the crops. Get the kids in there and, you know, nurture them! Especially with secondary students. We just don't treat them like the words *in loco parentis* have any meaning. You know? We're not acting as parents to the kids, we're acting as service providers to the kids. We're gonna fill them up with knowledge and send them on their way. When really the school should be such a more important role

in community and family, where a teacher is a certain parent: you're making sure the kid gets to school in the morning safely, has their breakfast at school in the morning. You don't just treat kids as a receptacle for math or English or history. It's a whole child that you're developing.

## 11. Summary

If not always definitively answering questions, these data have encapsulated the spirit of the thesis' theoretical grounding, which does not value decisive, final answers.

To recapitulate, according to the main research questions:

- Due to their various perceptions of students' interactions with media and the increased role of digital technology in young people's lives, teachers feel strongly that critical thinking skills must be employed in learning about various media. However, only a few espoused the tenets of critical media literacy in accomplishing these ends, mainly because of an undercurrent of apolitical consideration of the media themselves.
- Teachers' beliefs about their constraints lined up mainly with what had been reported in the literature; however, the constraints of anti-media bias and lack of teacher autonomy among teachers in the United States are the most controvertible, according to these teachers' narratives. Critical media literacy is perhaps most stymied by the fact that it is not a pedagogy endorsed by teaching colleges.
- Most often, teachers will apply critical pedagogies, even if obliquely, when they have the opportunity to teach about media's role in society. They at least report

that if given more of an opportunity to do so, they would dedicate more to discussions that would deconstruct the circuit of culture in students' lives.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter will wrap up my research, providing a summary of the evidence that supports, contravenes, or complements research in the application and constraints of critical media literacy, especially in terms of my research questions. So far, I have shown what teachers believe by way of their own narratives, and I wish to synthesize recommendations related to critical media literacy based on those stories. This chapter also covers limitations and avenues for future research.

#### **1. Implications**

Much of the literature I examined before developing a research question provided integral analysis and ideas about what critical media literacy is, and what it can do. To the extent, though, that the literature also reported that there were so many kinds of restrictions on enabling students with critical media literacy, I framed an interview guide that would offer teachers, such a rare voice in the literature, to reflect on their own personal ideas about how meaningful media literacy is in their classroom, and how amenable to such a pedagogy they would be. The type of research that exists that could justify critical media literacy to mainstreamed curricular policy, with the noted exception of Hobbs (2007) and Scharrer (2006, 2005), that might support incorporation of critical media literacy initiatives given our very data-driven U.S. Department of Education

(Toma, 2001), might not be enough to convince school systems (or teachers) to commit to top-down reform.

The research data showed plenty of assimilation with the reviewed literature, but the narratives of this small group of teachers also showed some resistance to be defined in certain terms in the literature, especially the aspects of autonomy, need and desire for critical exposure to media, and more balanced view of media and its potential for teachable moments. On the other hand, circumscribed by time, the school culture, and the fact that their jobs are on the line if they don't teach to the test revealed that teachers cannot prioritize the values of critical exposure, but rather generally use media as a tool to increase engagement in the scope of their lessons.

Kennedy's work (2005) hypothesizes the main reasons teachers don't adapt well to reform measures: [1] Teachers need more knowledge or guidance in order to alter their practices, [2] teachers hold beliefs and values that differ from reformers' and that justify their current practices, [3] teachers have dispositions that interfere with their ability to implement reforms, [4] the circumstances of teaching prevent teachers from altering their practices, and [5] the reform ideals themselves may be unattainable or may actually impede practice" (p. 12). Kennedy's lengthy analysis led her to believe that it is a combination of the last two hypotheses which are the most viable explanations for resistance to reform—it has less to do with teacher's lack of abilities, philosophies or affect, by and large, because those aspects of one's character can be so variable. But often, the drive for reform comes with it hubris and a lack of understanding of institutional practices: what *is* doable that is not being done in classrooms.

Understanding this, and seeing the support in teachers' narratives about their ideas of how they would do things if they had their way, it would be inadvisable for me to imply that critical media literacy should be implanted into public curricula, because clearly, it would be at the expense of other valuable exercises in literacy, traditional and otherwise.

I do see these narratives as examples of ways teachers use various strategies for implementing their required curriculum or teaching the required skills, and I see that not only are there so many forces in their jobs that they have no control over (time, scope of subject, need for students to cooperate, administrative burdens), but the way that teachers continue to do excellent and innovative work is by collaborating with others to stay in dialogue about best practices. I interpreted before that Jenkins et al. (2009) saw a Deweyan specter for 21<sup>st</sup> century education, and I believe as digital natives begin to fill the middle and secondary educational workforce, a facility with media literacy practices will increase, but that does not necessarily indicate that a more critical foundation will emerge.

## **2. Recommendations**

I can also see from high-frequency terms in learned curricular or pedagogical language (e.g. multiple intelligences, prior knowledge, bridging), that teachers do not only learn from experience, but from being instructed on useful material to think about when implementing a successful school experience for themselves and students, from planning to assessment. Top-down reform can seem repetitive, and even professional

development can chafe at these professionals who feel more informed by experience than by the lobbying of new initiatives. However, a dedication to media studies (not just technology skills, which can lose relevancy pretty quickly) could help teachers better interiorize the way media shapes society, and how education can fit in with that shape that both interests children, challenges their assumptions, and enables them to enact their ideas through the system. As Scheibe (2004) implied, critical media literacy should be taught as pedagogy rather than as a subject, so that teachers can filter their tasks as imparters of curriculum through this more critical approach. I would argue that pre-service teachers, however, do deserve exposure to trends in communications studies and how those fit in with pedagogical practice. Learning about media (as opposed to just technology) will keep teachers from becoming technicians who use media in class for its own sake. Learning about trends in communications studies would greatly benefit from, but not absolutely necessitate, the cooperation of communications or media studies faculties.

Voices in the literature complained of the lack of synergy that education and media studies have, and as Butler (2010) claims, this needs to change. Even a nominal amount of instruction in media concepts and history, assimilated with teachers' understandings of using media and successfully implementing curricula, would allow education professors to "set the agenda" for media literacy standards, as core standards are already calling for more and more knowledge which demands access to new literacies. Getting a group of pre-service teachers in English and Social Studies in a dialogue of what these terms mean and having teachers do free and simple "Adobe"

workshops in order to have workable knowledge in programs that can enrich students' "ownership" with media, as Eliza did, would not *require* a deep interfaculty commitment (though I would never discourage this collaboration). Kennedy (2005) said that teachers are less guided by their own beliefs and dispositions than they are by structural constraints of their jobs, so exposing to teachers in their pre-service training in ways to guide critical thinking about the media would be a promising way to bring not only media literacy to students, but to teachers.

What about critical media literacy? There are teachers who are internally motivated to apply critical pedagogy (often from self-study), and extremely interested in incorporating lessons about the circuit of media culture in classrooms (would also have to come from self-study). In practice, that inclusion criteria makes for a grain of sand in the context of our country's 2.5 million public school teachers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Consider that ACME only had about 400 members in 2005 (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Freire has undoubtedly inspired many educators in America, but we must accept the limitations of his applicability in the context of U.S. society. Just as Marx's analysis of economics and history in industrialized is socially misunderstood because his philosophies were applied in developing countries, attempts to apply Freire's pedagogies for economically depressed, illiterate adults in the global south to our relative privilege in the United States may be inherently misguided. Indeed, some studies have shown that kids don't want to be "emancipated"—they want a teacher at the fore. Tyma's experience (2009) shows that *students* are often very hesitant about a student-oriented shift.

But cultural studies have potential in our class context, and if teachers are guided to understand *why* we might look carefully at society through the various lenses of the circuit of culture, teachers have plenty of material to work from and collaborate with others in their careers.

### **3. Limitations**

For there to be a more holistic approach to answering my research questions, one would need unlimited time and resources. My research revealed highly variable attitudes from teachers in terms of what is available to them and how they see the success of students (often strongly marked between teachers in urban and suburban settings), and this variable is difficult to express in results without seeming to subvert the often valid concerns and circumstances of individual teachers. In fact, all research to this end cannot comprehensively answer questions about the effectiveness of curriculum; no class is “the average class” and thus, generalizability was not a goal, but it would be remiss to say that my 14 interviews were preeminently illustrative of the range of attitudes teachers have, especially granting that the group was self-selective. Many teachers have neither the time, nor energy, nor interest to describe their and their students' interaction with media in the classrooms.

Due to my exclusion criteria, I omitted the voices of multiple educators (working in other subjects or age ranges) who could contribute valuable insights into critical media literacy. Out of the scope of my research was the effectiveness of after school programs that impart media literacy, such as the school newspaper. Goodman (2003) offers,

“...Media education practitioners must either join forces with education reformers or look outside of schools to find other institutional partners” (p. 102). He also admits that the confinement of youth media education to the margins as such can reduce the impact of its teaching.

The interview method is fraught with issues relating to the choice that teachers have in their narrative, and because my research only explored this limited avenue of reported experience, I am greatly limited by not having more information about how the teacher validates his or her own experience and process of a teacher, without needing to enclose this concept in the scope of media literacy.

Further research into this topic could seek out a larger, more representative sample and could triangulate with ethnographic or quantitative instruments. Trends in creating online clearinghouses of lesson plans should be analyzed for their constellation with critical media literacy. A clearer line could be drawn in determining teachers’ commitments to critical media literacy based on their own preferred pedagogical models (including Freire’s) and the socioeconomic makeup and available resources at their schools. Comparative research would also help curricular planners see the effects of critical media literacy in other countries. As the paradigm of participatory culture of media continues to grow, research in the future should account for the new enactments of Web 2.0 in the classroom, and the extent to which students are given more opportunities to reflect about the whole circuit of culture. Continued validation of the voice of teachers, however, is recommended. Although there is no finite set of knowledge that makes

people view media critically, teachers should be empowered, just as their students should be, to become more literate in our hypermediated society.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**SOME CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES WHICH ADDRESS STUDENTS' NEED**  
**FOR MEDIA LITERACY**

From *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts*

“Students employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening and language use....They are familiar with the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and mediums and can select and use those best suited to their communication goals” (NGA Center, p. 7).

“Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.” (p. 35).

“Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g. lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film” (7<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 37).

“Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea” (8<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 39).

“Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically” (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 46).

“Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g. social, commercial, political) behind its presentation” (8<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 49).

“Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest” (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 50).

From *Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies*:

“Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts” (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 61).

“Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information” (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) (p. 66).

“Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation” (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade) (Ibid.).

**APPENDIX B:**  
**CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACIES**

According to Aufderheide (1993), media education in the United States should focus on:

- Media are constructed
- Media have commercial implications
- Media have ideological and political implications
- Form and content are related in each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes and conventions.
- Receivers negotiate meaning in media

According to Lusted (1991), media education in the UK focuses on:

- language
- narrative
- institution
- audience
- representation
- production

According to Masterman (1986), media education in the UK should focus on:

- All media messages are constructed
- Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
- Different people experience the same media message differently
- Media have embedded values and points of view
- Media are organized to gain profit and power.

According to Meyrowitz (1998) the new media literacies should focus on:

- Media content literacy--thinking analytically about what the medium presents, whether it's text, visual.
- Media grammar literacy--knowing the "tropes" of different media--what close-up means, what different typography is meant to suggest--essentially seeing how artists execute the story
- Medium literacy--understanding the culture, politics, history and economics of a medium's presence in society.

**APPENDIX C:**  
**IRB EXEMPTION**



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Research Compliance Services  
University of Oregon Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 20, 2012 **IRB Protocol Number: 02222012.020**  
TO: Caroline Stauss, Principal Investigator  
School of Journalism and Communication  
RE: Protocol entitled, "Critical Constraints in the Classroom: Assessing How Teachers Approach Media Literacy in Middle and Secondary Schools"

**Notice of IRB Review and Exempt Determination  
as per Title 45 CFR Part 46.101 (b)(2)**

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The above protocol has been reviewed by the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board and Research Compliance Services. This is a minimal risk research protocol that qualifies for an exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) for research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

Please note that you will not be required to submit continuing reviews for this protocol, however, you must submit any changes to the protocol to Research Compliance Services for assessment to verify that the protocol continues to qualify for exemption. Should your research continue beyond five years, you will need to submit a new protocol application.

Your responsibility as a Principal Investigator also includes:

- Obtaining written documentation of the appropriate permissions from public school districts, institutions, agencies, or other organizations, etc., prior to conducting your research
- Notifying Research Compliance Services of any change in Principal Investigator
- Notifying Research Compliance Services of any changes to or supplemental funding
- Retaining copies of this determination, any signed consent forms, and related research materials for five years after conclusion of your study or the closure of your sponsored research, whichever comes last.

As with all Human Subject Research, exempt research is subject to periodic Post Approval Monitoring review.

If you have any questions regarding your protocol or the review process, please contact Research Compliance Services at [human\\_subjects@orc.uoregon.edu](mailto:human_subjects@orc.uoregon.edu) or (541)346-2510.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheryl Johnson'.

Sheryl Johnson, BS, CHES, CIP  
Associate Director  
Research Compliance Services  
University of Oregon

CC: Leslie Steeves, Faculty Advisor

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS • RESEARCH COMPLIANCE SERVICES  
1600 Millrace Drive, Suite 105, 5237 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97401-5237  
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**APPENDIX D:**  
**PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

Name	Setting	Gender	Race	Years of Service	Currently Teaching	Other Subjects	Notes
<i>Alicia</i>	Suburban High School	Female	African-American	14	U.S. and Modern World History	Government, Social Studies	Previously taught special education
<i>Barbara</i>	Suburban High School	Female	White	17	English		Previously taught at college
<i>Cassidy</i>	Suburban High School	Female	Biracial	9	English		Worked as lead teacher and curricular planner; taking time off
<i>Deborah</i>	Suburban High School	Female	White	25	Modern World History, Psychology	U.S. History, Economics, sociology, government	Worked abroad and in private schools
<i>Eliza</i>	Urban Charter Elementary and Jr. High School	Female	White	5	Non-Fiction English, Global Media (9 <sup>th</sup> gr.)	Elementary and Middle School English	
<i>Frank</i>	Suburban Middle School and High School	Male	White	32	World studies, government	Leadership Academy	Ret.; Current substitute teacher and director at Leadership Academy
<i>George</i>	Suburban High School	Male	White	6	English	Rock and Roll History, Reading 180	Planning elective in social media

Name	Setting	Gender	Race	Years of Service	Currently Teaching	Other Subjects	Notes
<i>Heloise</i>	Urban High School	Female	White	2	English	Strategic Reading	Ret.; TFA alumna
<i>Ivy</i>	Urban Elementary and Middle School	Female	White	4	English (8th gr.)	Reading 180	
<i>Jamila</i>	Suburban High School	Female	White	20	Social Studies Research	U.S. History, government	Previously taught for nonprofit and summer programs, middle school, and community college
<i>Kristin</i>	Urban Elementary and Jr. High School	Female	White	10	English Language Arts (8 <sup>th</sup> gr.)		Previously taught in elementary school
<i>Lauren</i>	Suburban High School	Female	White	9	Social studies and remedial state test preparation	Taught at all levels starting in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade, including English Language arts	Special Education teacher (inclusive)
<i>Max</i>	Urban High School	Male	White	4	Modern world history and economics	Government, U.S. History	
<i>Nils</i>	Urban High School	Male	White	7.5	World History and Journalism	U.S. History	Ret.; Current doctoral student in media studies

**APPENDIX E:**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Rapport Building**

How long have you taught?

What classes do you teach?

What classes have you taught in the past?

How many schools have you taught in?

In general, what outcomes do you hope for in teaching students?

Redirect to their personal philosophy, if they focus on their school's outcomes.

**Media Use**

How would you describe your teaching style?

Describe how often do you use media in the classroom.

In what capacities do you use media in the classroom?

What are your goals for using media in the classroom?

How would you describe your students' use of media based on your own experience?

**Critical Media Literacy**

Please describe any times you've taught about media in the classroom? Examples?

What are your goals for *discussing* media in the classroom?

When you discuss media in the classroom, what role (as a teacher) do you strive to take?

What do students have to gain from using media as a tool for critical-thinking?

What keeps you from having more of these types of discussions?

**Lack of central mission or mandate/No infrastructure**

Describe any mandates or suggestions you have received from the administration or core standards relating to media literacy.

(If teacher has taught elsewhere) was this more encouraged at another school where you taught?

(If respondent does not perceive much administrative support or mandate). This is speculating, but based on some materials you've used coming from central mandates,

What type of materials would you expect to use for a unit on the evaluation of the media?

**Lack of teacher training/Expense of teacher training**

Can you recall and describe any discussion of media literacy in your teacher's college?

If yes, how have you applied that to teaching practice?

IF NOT, why do you think the school lacked these resources?  
Can you describe any discussion of media literacy in PD (professional development)?  
**No evaluation/No pre-testing**

Please describe what academic objectives you think are met by educating children in media literacy.

How do you assess outcomes for explorations in media-related study?

If you don't, how would you assess or evaluate students' reception to any media studies lesson.

### **Time constraints**

Would you dedicate more time to media studies if there were more time in the day?

If yes, what would you try to work on?

If not, what would you dedicate more time for your students?

### **Lack of curricular materials or resources**

Can you please describe what sort of support the school offers in designing lessons based on media literacy?

Can you describe the quality of your media center?

Can you describe the quality of your media specialist(s)?

Or librarian(s), if there is no "media specialist"?

### **Corporate media coopts media criticism/Sense that we don't \*need\* to be critical of it/Legitimacy of requirement**

To what extent do you think students understand the impact of media on their lives?

Can you say for sure if media literacy should be required in high school, or incorporated more?

(If not) Why not?

What should be prioritized in the curriculum above media literacy?

(If yes) Can you describe why you think so?

How should it be incorporated? (Ex: elective, required course, more incorporation across subject curricula, etc.)

Can you describe any forms of popular media that need to be critically dissected more than others?

### **No knowledge of success stories or precedent curricula by individual teachers**

Do you know of any other teachers who use media effectively in the classroom?

How would you describe their teaching style?

**Thank you so much for your time and ideas about media literacy today.**

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