REPAIR OF THE MEDIA:

EXERCISES IN CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY AT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

by

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12/10/10

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REPAIR OF THE MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:

This qualitative case study aims to provide insight into efforts to implement critical media literacy with elementary-aged populations in an after-school setting. Currently, The Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit provides the only comprehensive pedagogical framework and curriculum on the subject. Consisting of three resources for educators, the Kit encourages adaptation, application, and evaluation to further research in this area. My work, building upon the dearth of study previously done, looks to a novel context for implementation in order to provide evaluative data for not simply student assessment, but also curricular assessment.

Procedure:

Utilizing a research framework that blends ethnographic research with personal narrative, The Repair of the Media study presents three months of critical media literacy instruction at a Jewish Community Center. Through classroom fieldwork, participant interviews, and classroom observations, the principal researcher engages both teachers and students in a fourth/fifth grade classroom with seven developmentally appropriate CML MediaLit Kit lessons.

Findings:

My data presented five trends regarding student assessment of the curriculum in question, which I believe present a unique view in the previous landscape of study on this subject. These trends include: 1) The curriculum is extremely well liked, 2) The curriculum inspires students to want to learn more about the subject, 3) Students responded far more to the experiential portions of the curriculum, than to others, 4) Students often struggled to achieve deeper understandings and objectives associated with the curriculum's lessons, and finally 5) The curriculum did provide concrete opportunities that empowered elementary-aged young people to begin asking critical questions about the media and understanding media with a critical edge.

Conclusions:

My study discerned The Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit to be a curriculum both enjoyable and intellectually rewarding for elementary-aged students in an after-school setting. Equally important, the study also suggests it may play a crucial role in the skill-building initial steps necessary for students to begin understanding media with a critical perspective. Finally, future study will need to evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum as a singular tool for teaching critical media literacy, for my research illustrates this as an area of challenge for many students.

Chair

Signature

MA Program: Education
Sonoma State University

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background/Context

If my life were a film I can imagine no better place to begin than my falling headlong down the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I was fifteen and in Washington, D.C. with a congregation of twenty-seven young, Jewish Americans from New Jersey. We were told we were, all of us, patriots. Exercising our rights as democratic citizens, we had lobbied hard for Jewish causes, freedoms that, we were assured in the day’s prior, would enrich our birth land as tonic. This was, after all, tikkun olam, as the Jewish mystics prophesied, or “repair of the world.” We were stemming the tides of an ocean of oppression. Yet as I toppled, off-balance, down the ex-president’s plateau, I recalled not pride in my accomplishment but humility. I was no patriot, I realized; I was a parrot. Rather than making headway, I was drowning.

“...We cannot neglect the task of helping students become literate, choosing instead to spend most of the teaching time on political analysis,” Freire (1987, p.212) wrote sagely in his Letter to North-American Teachers. Such crucial insight, echoed by subsequent enlightened educators committed to their classrooms of social justice, represents an essential foundation for any critical pedagogy. Both the editors of the progressive publication Rethinking Schools (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007), and teacher educator Rahima C. Wade (2007), confirm, “A social justice classroom equips children not only to change the world but also to maneuver in the one that exists” (Au et al., 2007, p.xi). The sentiment is not notably a nod to placate the educational climate of state-mandated standards and high-stakes testing, but rather the maintenance of a socially just classroom as academically rigorous is paramount to any success. As in the above example, my metaphoric fall occurred from lack of skill building, as much as conviction. In their zeal for justice, my Hebrew School educators forgot a Rabbinic warning from the Gemara we, as critical educators working for societal change, must never forget: We are obligated to teach our young even to swim in water (Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, 1990, Tractate Kiddushin 29a).
Presented as such, the 21st century represents a vast sea of visual media, technology, and culture our students must learn to negotiate. In our world, "...fragmented, connected, converged, diversified, homogenized, flattened, broadened, and reshaped," by, "new information communication technologies and a market-based media culture," (Kellner & Share, 2007, p.1) multiple new and expanded modes of literacy are required for competency in this "New Time" (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Increasingly, youth aged 11-14 in the United States spend an average of 6 hours and 45 minutes a day using media, more time than they spend doing anything else except sleeping (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 2004). While literacy has traditionally referred to the reading and writing of the printed text, today's students require the ability to both interpret the powerful images of our multimedia culture and express themselves and their societal opinions utilizing these mediums of discourse (Thoman & Jolls, 2003). In other words, being "media literate" implies learning to "read" and "write" the pervasive language of images, sounds, and technology that now dominates our world.

This broadening of literacy is essential as the onslaught of television, popular music, film, and advertising rapidly being absorbed by the Internet into a ubiquitous cultural cyberspace represents a particular pedagogy (Kellner & Share, 2007). The often invisible and subliminal instruction embedded carry with them a too-often hegemonic litany of rules for behavior, identity roles, and values, that pervade identity formation (Torres & Mercado, 2006; McLaren, 2007). Operating inside this global nation will require of students a new type of patriotism, a "critical patriotism" we must construct with them piece-by-piece, skill-by-skill. It will employ, in this context, a "critical media literacy" that can serve as a Freirean praxis of "conscientization," or "...a process in which people are encouraged to analyze their reality, to become more aware of the constraints on their lives, and to take action to transform their situation" (Brown, 1987, p.225).

It is a huge task, a framework akin to rebuilding the Colossus of Rhodes, and yet, may be the singular path to an actualized tikkun olam. Indeed, it would be upon that footing, where we could finally be seen standing firmly among our frustratingly still unearned, but memorialized nonetheless, national ideals of freedom, justice and democracy.
Description of Research

The following qualitative case study chronicles efforts to implement elements of one such skill building media literacy curriculum, The Center for Media Literacy's (CML) *MediaLit Kit* (Jolls, 2008), in an elementary-aged, after-school classroom at a Jewish Community Center. Ultimately, the endeavor aims to plum, through classroom field work, interviews, and observations, the following research question in order to inform further curriculum development and educator training: 1) How do elementary-aged student participants in an after school setting evaluate and respond to the CML's curriculum?

Significance of Project

Media literacy remains in its infancy throughout the educational system in this country (Kellner & Share, 2007). Despite advocacy across educational journals and progressive circles, theorists continue to lament the persistent exclusion of "information era literacies" from both the K-12 curriculum and teacher education curriculum (Torres & Mercado, 2006). Proponents admit inclusion faces a myriad of challenges that include lack of funding, teacher experience and competency, as well as applicable curriculum (Kellner & Share, 2007). This uphill climb seems only exacerbated by the well-documented culture of test-driven mandates. How then, in our multi-modal society, are students expected to ever develop what Bigelow (1999) refers to as their "basic skill" for social justice, "critical reflection?"

The Center for Media Literacy, with their *MediaLit Kit*, have provided something of Shor's (1987) "...classrooms of illumination," a starting point, a glimpse into what is possible even under trying conditions (p.6). Their efforts include three resources: 1) *Literacy for the 21st Century: An Overview and Orientation Guide to Media Literacy Education* (Jolls, 2008); 2) *Five Key Questions That Can Change the World: Lesson Plans for Media Literacy* (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007); and 3) *Media Literacy Works!: Project SMARTArt: A Case Study in Elementary Media Literacy and Arts Education* (Quesada, 2005) which together suggest one particular laboratory dedicated to literacy. Like Horton's Highlander School, they provide inquiry tools for citizenship, as well as "...opportunities for people to grow," (Horton, 1990, p.133).
While Shor (1987) may be correct to have written, "Lone classrooms cannot change a social system" (p.14), the promise of a growing number of glimmering classrooms illuminated by a skill-building critical media literacy may finally serve to answer educational theorist Counts' (1932/2004) fundamental question, posed nearly one hundred years ago: Dare the school build a new social order (Flinders & Thornton, pp. 29-35)? Utilizing these CML tools, I look with this study to continue their work toward that vision, a world in which engaged citizens of a democracy sort through political packaging and corporate creation, understand and contribute to public discourse, and ultimately, make informed decisions that support their values, needs, and communities (Jolls, 2008). With the publication of the MediaLit Kit, this work has only begun. Far more research and insight into the possibility of educational adaptations, settings, and populations for the framework application are required to facilitate the type of revolution this may portend (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007).

Support for the Research

According to Jewish tradition, there exist 613 commandments for B'nei Mitzvot, or those who follow commandments, to abide by. Simeon the Just, to the contrary, preached of only three, upon which the world relies: Torah, or learning, avodah, or service, and gemilut hasadim, or acts of loving-kindness. As if to say that through learning, a community will in due course navigate themselves toward tikkun olam, or social justice. It is an inspiring prophetic tradition, and one upon which countless philosophers, educators, and artists have foundationally constructed their own works. Counts (1932/2004) wrote of schools as, “…centers for the building, and not merely for the contemplation, of our civilization,” (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p.32). Freire (1970) called this “Pedagogy of the oppressed.” Yet regardless the form, interpretation, or reconstruction, the vision remains consistent, from Jeremiah to John Dewey: Education can, and should, serve as a catalyst for societal progress.

As it exists, no form of media is neutral, in politics or agenda. For nearly seven hours a day, youth are sold everything from fluffy white toilet paper and bubble gum to American ideology, often times through the selfsame text. For many, this "consciousness industry" (Dorfman, 1983, p. 178) is grounds for critical media pedagogy, or one that actively attempts to
expose inequity in society (Vasquez, 2004). In their own advocacy, Keller and Share (2007) present the illustrative metaphor of the iceberg. “Many educators working under an apolitical media literacy framework guide their students to only analyze the obvious and overt tip of the iceberg they see sticking out of the water” (p.3). Yet hidden below the breach of such easily conjured protectionism may lay deeply embedded ideological notions of white supremacy, capitalist patriarchy, classism, homophobia, and other oppressive myths.

Understood in this regard, critical media literacy presents for some progressive educators not a choice, but a necessity (McLaren, 2007). If our society’s culture industry does indeed colonize the minds of youth, teaching them how to act, live, and dream (Christensen, 2000), one can imagine critical media literacy acting as something of “surgical instruments, to cut through the accretions that are the culturally-conditioned” (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p.viii). Put another way, one may use such a pedagogy to understand how broken our media has become, and thereby work to slowly transform it.

It is with this lens exactly that the CML has constructed its MediaLit Kit, “...a metaphor for a collection of core ideas and tools that are fundamental to media literacy’s inquiry-based pedagogy” (Jolls, 2008, p.17). CML believes in the enablement of all students to proficiently apply media literacy’s “Five Key Questions” routinely and regularly to all mediated experiences (Jolls, 2008). Flowing from the CML’s “Five Core Concepts,” which have evolved from traditional categories of rhetorical and literary analysis, these questions include: 1) Who created this message?; 2) What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?; 3) How might different people understand this message differently?; 4) What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?; and finally 5) Why is this message being sent? (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007). The key questions serve as an “enduring understanding” that students may garner in order to navigate their way through citizenship in our global media culture (Jolls, 2008).

Definitions of Terms

The term “media,” used here and throughout the following, is to be understood broadly, within the context of the Center for Media Literacy’s definition of media literacy (Thoman & Jolls,
CML believes media to include “...all forms of communication – from television to T-shirts, from billboards to multi-media environments” (CML website). Additionally, media literacy, refers not simply to learning to read and write the language of media, but to, “build an understanding of the role of media in society as well as the essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy” (CML Website). The term “text” is also broadened to include not just written texts, “...but any message form – verbal, aural or visual (or all three together!)—that is used to create and then pass ideas back and forth between human beings” (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p.6).

Similarly, critical media literacy implies, according to theorists Kellner and Share:

...an educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies. It deepens the potential of literacy education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information, and power. Along with this mainstream analysis, alternative media production empowers students to create their own messages that can challenge media texts and narratives (2007, p.2).

In other words, an educational response limited not simply to the teaching of how to “read” and “write” media, but as importantly toward the “critical” recognition that media – especially a mainstream media increasingly controlled by a handful of global corporations – wields tremendous societal power, including the influencing of behavior and identity (ACME website). Such critical analysis may be gleaned through the type of “close analysis” CML advocates for. This method of instruction or exercise allows students to, “...stop and look, really look, at how a media message is put together and the many interpretations that can derive from it” (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p.29). It can be accomplished engaging any media text, through a series of four steps: (a) analysis of visuals; (b) analysis of sounds; (c) application of key questions; and (d) summative review of insights.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

The following literature review begins with an introduction to the fundamental constructs of a critical education. Evolving over 2,000 years of tradition, from biblical antiquity to our present day, the pedagogical philosophy traces a commitment to an unceasing connection between education and repairing a world broken by inequity, injustice and indifference or hate for our fellow humans. In our modern context, this educational conviction manifests itself in the study of media, a now dominating force upon our lives. Discussion of this critical media literacy, as well as its theorists and practitioners, follows, in addition to a sampling of dissenting voices and contrasting views.

The Prophetic Tradition

The Bridge of Breath, Joy Wulke’s aerial sculpture of glass and steel, seems to float above the Jewish Community Center’s atrium as a rainbow glistening after a storm. Found in its earliest text (Genesis 7:7, The New JPS Translation), Judaism has long taught the parable of Noah, the exception to God’s destruction of Man for his wickedness and violence. One interpretation stands that following the flood, a similar rainbow appeared to Noah as a symbol of God’s promise to never again threaten humanity for their sins. Yet another reading understands the symbol not as a guarantee of passivity, but rather an empowering call to action. If God, the analysis concludes, with God’s rainbow was to recuse God’s self from remaking violence, injustice, and vice in humanity ever more, who would take up this gauntlet? Looking up at the sculpture, walking into the Jewish Community Center, one might reason the task has fallen to man.

For generations, Judaism has seen education as exactly such a rainbow. Torah, used both broadly as learning and specifically as Judaism’s most sacred text, has been ever championed as a path to peace. “She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy,” (Proverbs 3:18, The New JPS Translation, p.1289). As evinced in the traditional morning liturgy, Elu Devarim:
These are the obligations without measure, whose reward, too, is without measure: To honor father and mother; to perform acts of love and kindness...to welcome the stranger; to visit the sick...to make peace when there is strife. And the study of Torah is equal to them all, because it leads to them all ("Elu Devarim," (n.d.)).

This “prophetic tradition” has inspired a historically rich tapestry of social justice teaching that continues to be both relevant, and impactful today.

Over the past century, countless educational theorists have interpreted this wisdom as an educational praxis. To Freire (1970), such “pedagogy of the oppressed” has two illustrative stages, “…the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation,” (p.54). Education, in other words, acts as a rainbow of realization for a society still biblical in scope. In our nation that continues to “…manifest[s] the most extraordinary contradictions: dire poverty walks hand in hand with the most extravagant living the world has ever known,” (1932/2004, p.31) Counts wondered, “…what Jeremiah would say if he could step out of the pages of the Old Testament and case his eyes over this vast spectacle so full of tragedy and of menace.” He, like Freire, therefore advocated educationally for an enlightening instruction that allowed students to not simply contemplate society, but learn to rebuild it in a more just fashion. For his contemporary, Dewey, it was “In this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God,” (1929/2004, p.23).

Consequently, such progressive education often acts to foundationally build skills of citizenship. These “societal literacies” allow learners to translate, analyze, and engage in discourses of the day to, as aforementioned, unveil the world. Through this “true” education, in Dewey’s (1929/2004) thought, students begin to, “…share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use [their] own powers for social ends,” (p.19). In this context, learning to read becomes a political act, providing access to information, and protection against fraud (Freire, as cited in Brown, 1987). Horton referred to his understanding of such pedagogy as “the Highlander idea,” under which people can learn to identify their problems, and figure out how to solve them through community action (Manke, 1999). In his Citizenship Education Schools people saw the possibility, “…for human beings to be kind and caring, to work together, and to live without class, race, and sex inequalities,” (Kohl, 1980, p.59).
Critical Media Literacy

Currently, in today's media saturated society, educational theorists have begun advocating for a more specific type of rainbow as citizenship education in schools: Critical media literacy (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Kellner & Share, 2007; Torres, & Mercado, 2006). As Silver and Thoman (1992), of the Center for Media Literacy have written: Media now dominates our world.

From the clock radio that wakes us up in the morning until we fall asleep watching the late night talk show, we are exposed to hundreds, even thousands of images and ideas not only from television but now also from newspapers headlines, magazines covers, movies, websites, video games and billboards...Media no longer just influence our culture. They are our culture (Silver & Thoman, 1992).

Defined as such, it has been suggested that media today can be understood as a pedagogic socializing force, much akin to the “global village” McLuhan once envisaged (Moody, 1999). Pedagogy refers here to a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within populations (Giroux & Simon, 1988). While research disagrees on the extent and type of socializing this “community” provides, it is unquestionable that it exerts a significant impact on the way youth understand, interpret and act on our world (Thoman & Jolls, 2003). As all media is constructed, each and every aspect carries with it a subtext of whom or what is important to the person, people, or corporation that created it.

Over the past quarter century, media creation has become increasingly the providence of a handful of for-profit corporate conglomerates (Torres & Mercado, 2006). “Mass media,” or any tool or technology used for sending messages from a central source to many receivers (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007), can thereby be seen with a largely Marxist critique. That is to say, mass media contributes to the inequitable status quo of our capitalistic republic, much in the same way some believe traditional education has (Feinberg & Soltis, 1985). Through almost complete saturation of the youth population, and sophisticated strategies for control, media has garnered not only enormous influence on economic behavior, but social behavior, “naturalizing” particular lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors (Jolls, 2008). These elements of cultural capital are integral to identity formation, and may take shapes as mild as language-influenced catch phrases, or as insidious as racism, homophobia, and governmental propaganda.
Therefore, learning to distinguish between different media forms, as well as the mastery of asking basic questions regarding authorship, content, and message of each and every text that we see, read, or hear, has become an essential literacy for citizens of the 21st Century. Masterson (1994) deemed this “critical autonomy,” or the consistent ability to independently question media construction and content. Such ability to engage, or read, media critically allows for not simply an understanding of how media affects oneself and one’s community, but the mandate to use, or write, media to ultimately advocate on behalf of oneself, one’s community, and finally the type of society one wants to build.

The Center for Media Literacy

Such educational experiences remain rare in the United States. While most of the 50 states’ educational standards now make mention of “media education,” the subject remains largely ignored at teacher conferences, educational institutions, and throughout curriculum (Kellner & Share, 2007). Despite the advocacy of theorists like Masterman (1989) for well over twenty years, there remains debate over not only how to teach about the media, but whether or not to do so at all.

Postman (1985), for one, believes media to be a so influencing a force that students must be “protected” from its negative manipulation at the cost of an entire generation. Rather than empowering students with tools to think critically, Postman values traditional media, and a rejection of such texts as television, film, and video. Organizations like The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) may not go so far as Postman, believing, as they do, in the need for an expansion of the teaching of literacy to include visual media (NAMLE website), yet such views correspond with notions of youth protection. That is to say, one that insulates youth from difficult and, in their opinion, “developmentally inappropriate” subjects, including race, class, and gender-norms.

The Center for Media Literacy, in contrast, believes “simple questions about the media can start even at the toddler stage,” (Jolls, 2008, p.14) and they have, as a result, looked to fill the media literacy void with, “...a framework for taking teachers through all of the necessary stages, components, ideas and assumptions about media literacy...” (Masterman, as cited in Jolls, 2008,
Utilizing a more critical media literacy lens, CML has sought to organize and promote, "...the basic higher-order critical and creative thinking skills...that form the very foundation of both intellectual freedom and the exercising of full citizenship in a democratic society" (Jolls, 2008, p.8). Their MediaLit Kit provides, for the first time, an accessible, integrated outline of the foundational concepts and implementation models needed to organize and structure teaching activities (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007) for educators, pre-school to higher education, working to engage in this new type of literacy education (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Building upon the Freirian (1970) praxis, the MediaLit Kit articulates media literacy theory, practice, and implementation strategies for educators in the form of three resources. The first, *Literacy for the 21st Century* (Jolls, 2008) outlines the theoretic reasoning behind media literacy education, and introduces CML's Basic Framework for engaging in such a pedagogy: The Five Key Questions. The questions are expanded upon in the second resources, *Five Key Questions That Can Change the World* (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007), packaged with "25 cornerstone lesson plans" which emphasize not just analysis, but also creative implementation. In other words, concrete activities educators and students together can utilize in order to unveil the world of media, and learn to transform it. Finally, *Project SMARTArt* (Quesada, 2005), a case study, chronicles one effort to pilot the curriculum at the elementary school level, demonstrating through qualitative explorations an example of the enrichment and possibility in these classroom literacy and learning skills being realized.

To date, the only outside evaluation published regarding the CML curriculum has been done by Dunlop & Kymes (2007) with their *Analysis Of Media Literacy Curriculum: The Center for Media Literacy's Media Lit Kit*. In their examination, CML's efforts are categorized as, "...clearly grounded in critical theory," an endeavor which, "...strips down the process of schooling and illuminates how power is inextricably tied to what people know and how they come to know it" (p.11). This apt association situates the curriculum in an educational minority, if not a minority within the minority. For one thing, as already mentioned media literacy, let alone critical media literacy, is, "...not an option," according to Kellner & Share (2007), "...because it is not available; it is not even on the radar. Unlike educators in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, many in the US are not informed enough about media literacy to even consider it," (p.1). Additionally, the
paucity in teacher educational opportunities is exacerbated by a debate about why and how to teach it (Hobbs, as cited in Kellner & Share, 2007, p.2)

Kellner and Share (2007) dissit the “debate” into four schools of media education. The aforementioned protectionist approach, popularized by Neil Postman, argues media and technology is, “...a form of idolatry and our belief in its beneficence can be a false absolute. The best way to view technology is as a strange intruder, to remember that technology is not part of God’s plan but...rests entirely on human awareness of what it does for us and to us” (1998). In his estimation, mass media like television is far too influential on our society and must be limited.

More similar to critical media literacy’s approach, a second school of thought, media arts education, empowers students with the ability to both value the aesthetic qualities of media and the arts and utilize them for creative-self expression. In contrast, though, to critical media literacy, this branch deemphasizes media as a source of social critique (Kellner & Share, 2007). A third option, the media literacy movement, has proven the most popular thus far in the United States, exemplified by national organizations like the above mentioned National Association for Media Literacy Education. Their approach envisions media literacy as, “...an essential life skill for the 21st century...By applying literacy skills to media and technology messages, by learning to skillfully interpret, analyze, and create messages, media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of messages using image, language, and sound” (NAMLE website). As with the second approach, this parallels critical media literacy sans the political implications CML advocates for. Point of fact, critics of this movement, including the Action Coalition for Media Education, argue this movement not only ignores political implications, but is funded to do so by corporations that control the media (ACME website).

CML offers with their resources a specific invitation to improve classrooms, schools, and the world, “...one student at a time” (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007, p.6), yet such efforts, of course, have only begun. Theory, practice, and implementation not only inform each other, but change each other over time. New research and insights into the application of these foundational tools are required to facilitate a lasting impact upon the educational community (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007). Building upon this first case study, “next steps,” including further assessment
creation, and implementation beyond the standard school day, are essential to bolster these pioneering efforts (Quesada, 2005).

Equally as vital to the blooming of this process are the individualized insight of participants, their capacities, interest, and habits (Dewey, 2004) regarding the media before, during, and after interactions with the MediaLit Kit. This type of qualitative data is absent completely from Project SmartArt case study, which allows instead theorist, educator, community voices to ascribe specific student understandings like, "...it helped them feel better about dealing with [violence] on an everyday basis," (Quesada, 2005, p.24). In contrast, youth "specifics," garnered through interviews, quotes, or personal writing, provide insight into not simply curriculum, but the development of transformative teaching at large (Kazemek, 2004). Such direct youth voice and insight into curricular evaluation is also missing from the work of Dunlop and Kymes (2007).

Conclusion to the Review of Literature

With their publication of the MediaLit Kit the Center for Media Literacy presents a curriculum that, in their estimation, epitomizes one blossoming flower on a particular branch of a pedagogical tree. Its rootstock represents a prophetic tradition that views education as an opportunity to inspire communal action and a repair of the world’s social ills. Its trunk a critical pedagogy that empowers learners to foster an awareness for the many apparatuses of power across a capitalistic society that consciously shape the actions, lifestyles and beliefs of a nation, as well as the complimentary ability to transform those structures for the good of all mankind. Branching outward, toward other trees in a forest of educational ideas, is a new growth concerned exclusively with media and its effect on society. This particular branch, weaving itself through a diverse canopy of outlooks on the modern phenomenon, differs from others, especially those growing from other trees. This branch’s flowers of critical media literacy stand apart from other interpretations of media and its place in the educational landscape, born of sap long nurtured by the drive to transform society for the better. The following research is therefore a botanical effort, placing one unique flower under a microscope to try and truly divine its properties and place upon the landscape. With a paucity of information and evaluation of critical
media literacy curriculum, specifically this one, chapters 3 through 5 will look to further fill in a field guide for educators.
Chapter 3  

Methodology  

Purpose of Research

From the ubiquitous iPhones in our pockets, to the advertisements on every saleable inch of real estate on buses or banners, we are living in a world dominated by media. As educators, can it be anything less than an obligation to teach our students to not simply learn to read and write, but read and write this discourse of our information age? These skills for the 21st Century will allow the students of tomorrow to operate in a world in which we can only begin to imagine, a rapidly changing world, which will require, "...critical thinking and collaborative skills...to analyze data flowing from computers, to synthesize a complexity of information, to relate it to the task at hand..." (Gibbs, 2006, p.19).

This qualitative case study is designed specifically to provide insight and information into one such curricular boon to this endeavor, my effort to implement the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit with elementary-aged populations in an after-school setting at a Jewish Community Center. The educational research will involve active classroom fieldwork, participant interviews and observations, blended "ethnographic research" (Nieto, 2004), and Kazemek's (2004) narrative "condensery" in order to explore both the theoretic justifications of such educational exploits, as well as use of one practical and available tool. All classroom project aspects of the study, both pedagogy and curriculum, have been constructed using the CML's MediaLit Kit as a guide, in companionship with the agreements and norms of the classroom in which it will be piloted. Adaption of this curriculum, including a theoretic framework, lesson plans, and models for implementation, will ultimately provide evaluative data for not simply student assessment, but also curricular assessment.

Resources Used in Research

The following qualitative research exploration will involve the support of an urban Jewish Community Center. As an employee of the Center, I have already received the blessing of several key figures within the organization, including the Director of Youth and Family Programming,
and the After-School Program Manager. Each have encouraged the research as professional
development for me as Teen Program Manager, and an empowering opportunity for the youth I
will be working with. While the research support has not been financial, I have the complete
partnership of both the Director of Youth and Family Programming and the After-School
Program Manager in dealing with participant parents, participants, and project development.
The project has also received the complete support of both classroom teachers in the after-school
fourth/fifth grade class I will work with. Both the Lead Teacher, and the Assistant Teacher are
open to the experience, and eager to participate in a meaningful way to support their students.

Description of the Sample

Based in an urban, west coast city, the Jewish Community Center’s After-School Program
is open to families of all cultures and backgrounds. After-school students participate daily in a
wide range of enrichment activities including athletics, performing arts, and academic pursuits.
Thematic curriculum across disciplines and programming support a learning environment
focused on community creation between students from a diversity of mostly public elementary
schools.

Being an institution devoted to student centered learning, experiential learning, and non-
traditional classroom learning makes the after-school program an ideal venue for the site of this
research. Not only does such an atmosphere engender students to the project, documentation has
not, as of yet, been facilitated regarding implementation at such a venue. Additionally, as a
colleague of the educators directly involved with the program, the site has appeal due to my
membership in the “community.” Familiarity with the resources, space, and students involved in
the program will allow me to communicate freely and effectively with all involved parties from
my research’s beginning, through to the end.

The fourth/fifth grade classroom was specifically chosen due to developmental concerns.
While the MediaLit Kit can be both simplified for younger children with limited vocabulary or
language ability and expanded for more sophisticated inquiry by teens (Share, Jolls, & Thoman,
2007), I hoped to work with elementary-aged students who had begun to garner the ability to
think abstractly or hypothetically. As the MediaLit Kit cites, students between the ages of 10-12,
"...can think logically," and "...begin to be able to think abstractly, solve problems of probability, and generalize" (Jolls, 2008, p.71). Of course, children, "...of the same chronological age can be dramatically different...These differences, in turn, affect the young person's ability to learn and master the skills of media literacy inquiry" (Jolls, 2008, p.72). As a result, the kit encourages adaptations and specialized applications, where appropriate, as well as "CML's Questions to Guide Young Children," a scaled down version of the five questions. My sample age will allow the opportunity to experiment with both sets of questions, as well as a diverse range of participants capable of differing understandings.

Classroom participants will include 27 students between the ages of 10 and 12. Of the group, exactly 18 are European American, 4 are Asian American, 3 are African American, and 2 are Latino. The class includes 13 boys, and 14 girls. Economically, two-thirds represent a middle-to-upper class family, with the other third more representative of a lower class. Both educators are European American, as am I. The lead teacher and I are also male, while the assistant teacher is female. It can also be noted that of all involved parties, 14 self-identified as Jewish.

Classroom interviews, essential for the research exploration, will include a group of approximately 5 to 10 students. These specific participants will be chosen by the following criteria: 1) Interview participants will all receive parental consent to participate both in the classroom research study and the interview portion; 2) Participants will represent a diverse group of populations, including differing economic classes, ethnic groups, and genders; and finally 3) Participants will self select for participation in the interview portion of the research by choosing "media" during the elective portion of their after-school day.

Measurement

As mentioned, research data will be gathered utilizing an ethnographic approach, involving participant interviews, active classroom fieldwork, and classroom observations. Participant interviews will involve the principle researcher and study participants. Interviews will utilize a familiar classroom for reflection, from Gibbs (2006) *Tribes Learning Communities*, entitled "Flies On the Wall" (p.248). It is routinely used by classroom educators and ideal for these students as a tool to reflect upon both curriculum and classroom experience. Interviews will
be held in person, for 10 to 15 minutes each, in both the participant’s after-school classroom, and the Youth & Family Department’s conference room. Interviews will be conducted with a rotating group of 2 to 5 participants each following each lesson. All interviews will be audio recorded, and focus on the subject of media, participant impressions regarding media, and thoughts on classroom exercises involving media. The following research question will drive all sessions: How do elementary-aged student participants in an after school setting evaluate and respond to the CML’s curriculum?

The active classroom fieldwork will involve audio-recorded classroom instruction utilizing CML’s MediaLit Kit as a curriculum. Additionally, research data will be procured using one possible assessment tool suggested by the kit, the Close Analysis. This basic media literacy exercise involved classroom participation that allows students the opportunity to, “...stop and look, really look, at how a media message is put together and the many interpretations that can derive from it” (Jolls, 2008, p.62). Research will included two close analyses with students, conducted by principle researcher, one prior to implementation of the study, and one afterwards.

All classroom observations will be done without audio recording. Five initial classroom visitations will be done prior to work beginning in the classroom, and three will be done afterward. Detailed notes will be taken for all sessions, and will inform both student assessment and general classroom understanding. Much of this information will inform the narrative reflection to be presented in Chapter 4.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Research explorations will ultimately looked to inform: How elementary-aged student participants in an after school setting evaluate and respond to the CML’s curriculum? Suggestive answers will manifest through both models of research. One ideally will emerge reflectively, “...forming itself into a particular shape as I sit at my desk in front of my computer screen and condense” (Kazemek, 2004, p.225). Like Kazemek (2004), I will look with this research to teach about literacy, and afterward write about what I learned and how I was may be transformed in the process. Additionally, using an ethnographic approach to data collection, I plan to produce information that while unable to provide quantitative causal information, may shed some light
on the qualitative issues of curricular and pedagogical assessment. Using both the suggested lesson plans and teaching techniques of the CML MediaLit Kit, observing the results, and comparing those results to the information garnered through interviews, and the close analyses exercises, I can ideally draw results that inform future theory, practice, and implementation.

To accomplish this later piece, I plan to utilize Strauss' (1987) constant-comparative method to draw central conclusions and themes from these data sets, including detailed transcriptions of the interviews, classroom lessons and observations. The data sets will then be coded based on emergent themes, and finally sorted according to these themes so that I may further explore and glean conclusions through data comparison.

Procedures

Research will proceed with two distinct stages: Curricular planning, and pedagogical implementation. Curriculum planning will include several visitations to the fifth grade classroom to both observe community practice and norms, as well as facilitate the complete collaboration of Lead, and Assistant, Teachers. Additionally, both teachers, as well as the Program Manager and myself, will spend several hours discussing the critical media literacy framework that will inform our exercises, as well as familiarizing all parties with the Center for Media Literacy, and their MediaLit Kit. Through collaborative knowledge of theory, and classroom community, we will work in concert to choose five CML lessons plans to utilize in the classroom. Lesson plans will be chosen from the Five Key Questions ...(2007) for several reasons, among them: 1) Each lesson will be representative of, and introduce effectively, one of the five questions; 2) Each lesson will be developmentally appropriate; and 3) Each lesson, in the agreement of all four of us, will feel both relevant, and accomplishable for our students.

With our five lessons chosen, I will also design two “bookend” lessons to introduce, and conclude the unit. With the support of classroom teachers, these lessons will frame the study of media within the understanding, norms, and curricular characteristics of the after-school classroom. The lessons will also allow the opportunity to not only set the students up comfortably to succeed, but reflect upon the learning process as well. Each lesson will also include a close analysis exercise, done in small groups.
Implementation exercises will involve a series of inside the classroom lessons, and outside the classroom interviews. All will be conducted using the CML’s suggested pedagogy, “the Empowerment Spiral” (Jolls, 2008). Also called “Action Learning,” the technique builds upon the approaches of both Freire and Dewey, engaging students in a series of inquiry motivated learning steps (Jolls, 2008). Through four levels: 1) Awareness; 2) Analysis; 3) Reflection; and 4) Action, students can direct their own way to understanding of media, and media’s inherent power, through utilization of the Five Key Questions. In other words, students are empowered to practice the reading of media so that they may begin to write their own.

Each lesson will involve 60 minutes of classroom instruction, once a week. Instruction will occur over a continuous period of seven weeks. Once again, following instruction will be the interviews conducted in small groups. Interview questions will cover a broad range of topics, flowing freely due to the inspiration and inquiry of the students involved. Direction will also be informed by the aforementioned “Flies On the Ceiling” strategy of reflection. This will include asking reflection questions typically used in the classroom like: 1) The best thing about media class today was?; 2) The worst thing about media class today was?; 3) To make this class more enjoyable, I wish...?; 4) What was your expectation for today’s media class?; 5) If I could change one thing about today’s class it would be?; 6) Today I learned...?; and 7) One thing that would help me learn better is?
Chapter Four

Findings

Chapter Design

The following chapter includes seven case-study-styled “snapshots” of my interview subjects, a subsequent account of my project and a careful synthesis of findings. Together, these various strands will be presented as a narrative that weaves my three data sets, along with classroom observations, lesson recordings and interview recordings, into a cohesive presentation. The sum will ideally not simply reflect on my experiences with the CML curriculum, but the unique experience of the student participants with this novel curriculum.

These student participants include: 1) Vadim, a precocious, ten-year-old, Jewish, first generation son-of-middle-class-Russian immigrants, attending fourth grade at a public school; 2) Lillian, a Christian African American class clown from a working-class family, ten-years-old in fourth grade at a low-income public school; 3) Ellie, an opinionated, littlest sibling in a large, upper-middle-class, European American family that does not identify as Jewish. Ellie attends fifth grade at a public school and she is eleven; 4) Lauren, a type-B personality, from an equally large, upper-middle-class, European American family, is Christian, and attends another public school in fourth grade at eleven-years-old; 5) Ruben, a thoughtful, ten-year-old, Asian American young man, attending fourth grade in a public school from a middle-class family; 6) Gretchen, an articulate, young-woman-of-privilege, Jewish European American, attending the fourth grade at a public school at ten-years-old, and finally; 7) Sophie, a ten-year-old, quiet wallflower waiting to break out, who attends public school in fourth grade, from a Christian, middle-class family.

Interview Subject #1, Vadim

The “big idea” was Vadim’s, but this was little surprise to me in retrospect. I very quickly learned he would be first at everything in what quickly became known as “Media Class.” Case in point, Vadim was the first student to speak in the very first lesson. I asked, “So who knows what media is? Anyone?” and his hands, both of them, flew skyward, clapping together, robot-style. “Can I do an introduction?” he asked, plowing ahead with nary an answer:
Shock, shock: Shhhhhwwapp...beep, beep, beep...these are the sounds of media class. Media class is a class where you like movies and you make up your own characters and cartoons. This is what media is.

And for thirty seconds, at least, he was exactly right. People listened when Vadim spoke, regardless how outlandish the monologue; he wore proud his eccentricities as a peacock wears feathers. As soon as he told me about the “big idea” I knew the whole class would go along with it. For all I knew, it was he who had convinced all seven of my interview subjects to be “media guinea pigs” with him.

Vadim was not only first as my interview subject. Vadim was the first grandchild born into his family, the first of a new generation to be born in the United States. His family is Russian émigré, regulars at the Jewish Community Center since before he was born. Now comfortably middle class, Vadim acted like he owned the place, interacting with everyone, from his fellow students and teachers to the security guards, as peers. Needless to say, it’s how he treated his family as well. Vadim had “big expectations” coming into media class. He told me in our final conversation, “...I was thinking we would be on computers, or going on Google, or building a 3-D house.” As we didn’t do any of those things, I asked him if he were disappointed. “I was actually happy,” he told me. “...we did little things that helped us do a bigger thing.” I asked him what the big thing was, and that’s when he told me about the idea.

Introduction to Findings

With this project, I ultimately endeavored to provide an additional perspective and assessment of the CML’s MediaLit Kit that I had not encountered in previous literature: that of the student participant. Through a seven-week media class I piloted five carefully chosen lessons, two curricular assessment tools, as well as regularly interviewed seven program participants, utilizing a student reflection strategy to garner information and data to provide some glimpse into this additional discourse. I believed, and still do, there is value in the qualitative findings of this researcher who through twelve weeks of classroom field work, including observations, found himself once again standing before a group lobbying hard for repairing the world. Only this time, all these years after my experiences as a teenager in Washington, D.C., I knew exactly why I was doing it and how to do it. Or at least I hoped I did.
To those ends, I chose a series of lessons that would represent the breadth and depth of the MediaLit Kit in the context of the after school classroom I would be teaching in for seven weeks. Subtitled “Five Key Questions That Can Change the World,” the curriculum was created to, “...help establish common ground on which to build ... programs, teaching materials and training services in an increasingly mediated world,” (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007, p.4). With the strong input of the primary classroom teachers, we selected lessons that would adequately represent each of CML’s Five Key Questions of Media Literacy, would be developmentally appropriate for the hybrid fourth and fifth grade classroom and would feel both relevant and accomplishable for the students. The lessons were not altered from their suggested implementation outline in the MediaLit Kit, save the addition of an inclusive “Community Circle,” (Gibbs, 2006, p.226) at the beginning of each lesson, to consistently hold to their established classroom norms, and the strategy, “Flies On the Ceiling,” (Gibbs, 2006, p.248) added to each end of the lesson to support our reflection interviews. In this regard, we believed the lessons would empower students to understand the essential framework and foundational aspects of the curriculum in the time and space restrictions provided for us because of the after school program’s structure.

The five lessons chosen included: 1) Lesson 1a, “What is Communication?: One-Way vs. Two-Way,” to represent question one, “Who created this message?;” 2) Lesson 2a, “Basic Visual Language I: Three Building Blocks,” to represent question two, “What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?;” 3) Lesson 3a, “Do I See What You See? Interpreting Media Experiences,” to represent question three, “How might different people understand this message differently?;” 4) Lesson 4d, “Heroes, Heroines and Who I Want to Be,” to represent question four, “What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?;” and finally 5) Lesson 5a, “Why We Communicate: Three Basic Tasks,” to represent question five, “Why is this message being sent?” (Share, Jolls, & Thoman, 2007). Because of the inherent opportunity within the lesson plan to create media, and therefore apply the many lessons learned in media class, Lesson 5a was additionally chosen as a learning assessment tool at the end of the unit. This final lesson was therefore stretched into two media classes and packaged with a pedagogical technique suggested by CML, the Close Analysis. By both constructing a first media class with a Close Analysis and ending the last class with another, the primary classroom teacher...
and I believed we would have an additional tool to assess the students' takeaways. In this way, we had seven classroom sessions.

Complete lesson plans are available in appendix 1. In brief, we began with an introduction to the unit and a Close Analysis as our first lesson. Our second, (1a in the CML curriculum), was used to illustrate all media as constructed or authored, demonstrating the difference between getting information from TV, radio or even a newspaper (one-way communication) versus talking with a friend (two-way communication). This lesson utilized whole classroom discussion and a partner activity. Our third lesson (2a) introduced three fundamental elements of visual language, camera angle, lighting and composition, through a series of hands-on exercises in media creation. Since media messages will always be interpreted by different people in different ways, our fourth lesson (3a) allowed students to experience two events, one live and one mediated, empowering them to discuss the differences using the comparative concepts of "deduced" or "connoted." In lesson five (4d), students worked in teams to explore the attributes of popular media heroes/heroines and compare them through artwork and discussion with real people they know and admire. Finally, our sixth and seventh lessons (5a plus the second close analysis) allowed students to grapple with why media messages are sent through the creation of three different media texts that they realized in teams.

While the diversity in lessons allowed students to experience the CML-suggested curriculum and pedagogy, including the garnering and implementation of media making, media deconstruction and media awareness skills, the follow-up interviews allowed both the students, and eventually me, the essential opportunity to evaluate the CML experience. Seven students aided in this endeavor, including Vadim, who has already been mentioned. Would they experience the, "...'aha' that signals the dawn of insight, the excitement of making connections, the growth of understanding," (p.6) promised by Share, Jolls, and Thoman (2007)? The following are my findings, garnered through my careful sifting through the recorded classroom sessions, notes taken during my classroom observations both before and after the media class sessions and lastly the exit interviews that proved ultimately most enlightening.
Interview Subject #2, Lillian

As if to underscore the pervasive nature of media in our society, Lillian introduced herself as “Bob the Builder” at our first media class. It also served to underscore her classroom role as a builder of laughs. Yet despite an ever-present penchant for distracting other students, I never begrudged Lillian her jokes. I quickly found, much like Lillian herself, they veiled a rich and beautiful core of infinite insight and compassion. During our initial lesson, for example, I will never forget her addition to our classroom agreements. No, we would not utter any put-downs, as one student corroborated. Yes, we would attentively listen, another echoed. Yet only Lillian thought to request we, “…dance at the end of each class!” It became a wonderful ritual the entire community of students embraced, of course, with the caveat Lillian brainstormed, that prior to our celebratory finish, “…we always listen with our eyes, our ears, our hearts and don’t move too much.”

Lillian was one of the youngest students in media class, on the younger end of fourth grade, but I also found in my experiences with her that she was extremely proud of being an older sister to a sibling with significant special needs. I would often imagine Lillian going home to share her media lessons with her little brother, as she would readily share jokes, stories and commentary with other students. She told me once, with amazement in her eyes, how she learned that, “…even with a small camera and a tiny light and different angles you can make a video super cool.”

Lillian is African American and went to a different school than many of the other after school program participants, one that had the reputation of servicing a lower socioeconomic population of San Francisco, but Lillian never seemed to suffer any discomfort or alienation. To the contrary, Lillian consistently brought life to our lessons, embracing every activity and opportunity. She proved to relish each and every media class, which she summed up once as, “…awesome. Fun. Cool. A second awesome. And a second fun.” It proved to be a popular description.
The First Trend

It was positively, consistently and unequivocally apparent to me through all of my data that students loved the CML’s curriculum. From the first lesson, interviews and classroom recordings reverberated with comments like: 1) “I thought media class was really awesome,” 2) “It was amazing,” and 3) “Media was fun as always!” In addition to allowing students to, “...interact with real media stuff,” in Vadim’s words, that they, “…could not live without,” including YouTube, TV, computer programs and iTunes, the curriculum routinely allowed them to be, “…actually filming, making podcasts, you know...do different things with media.”

Whether it be activities that empowered students to watch and respond to visual media, listen and respond to audio media or create media of their own with computers, camera or markers, the curriculum almost always elicited, like Lillian’s reaction, maximum student participation and attention, often accompanied by demanding, “…ooh, ooh, ooh,” hand raises, “…me, me, me,” requests, or a chorus of, “Are we going to take turns?” Said of media class in one student, Ellie’s, final interview session, “That was awesome. And if I could, I would do it again.”

Utilizing media and technology proved to be a limitless source of joy for the students throughout each lesson. When asked about their favorite moments from the curricular experience, students often spoke about mediated experiences including, “I liked that we got to watch commercials,” “The taking of the pictures,” or “I liked doing the close-ups and...the medium and the wide.” The top activity of all, mentioned by six of the seven interviewees in their final interview, was, “The Final Project,” the final activity presented in Lesson 5a that prompted students to create three different pieces of media, including a video, a poster and a podcast. Each piece of media was to represent a single topic in three distinct ways, illustrating the three different reasons for communication: 1) To inform, 2) to persuade, and 3) to entertain. Said Vadim, “I really liked doing different styles [of media] in the final project. I had never...[made] a movie by myself!” In another student, Ruben’s words it was, “…the best,” because he, “…liked making stuff.” Ellie went so far as to suggest one way to improve the curriculum would be to, “…do the whole commercial project the whole time. Little parts every day.” It was a suggestion that would undoubtedly please most of the participants, a class that often chose to embrace media when it was not even a subject for instruction. Countless times, the class would break into
song (usually Michael Jackson) or choose to dedicate free time before media class, after media
class, to simply repeating things they saw, heard or experienced in some form of popular, mass
media. In this regard, even I became a symbol for excitement. My visiting the after school
classroom to speak with one of the teachers on an “off” day, or during my classroom
observations following our seven week run, would elicit joyous calls for, “...more media class!”

In many ways, this ubiquity could also be a distraction. As often as the media and
technology presented in each lesson would enthral the students, it would drive them off task, as
cameras would be fought over and watching commercials would devolve into giggle fests. I
would often find myself saying, as a mantra, “Ignore the screen! Eyes on me.” And yet, students
inevitably came back to any given task. The lesson always proved infinitely more exciting than
not participating, the threatened result of any lapse in focus. This seemed, through my
observations, to establish the topic of media as fairly unique, perhaps begging the outstanding
question: Was my subjects’ observed devotion to the curriculum or the ability to so thoroughly
interact with their cherished media?

Interview Subject #3, Ellie

Ellie was quiet until she had something to say. When inspired, Ellie’s opinions were
fireworks, exploding across media class, regardless the circumstances. “Religion is an opinion,”
she told the class when discussing values. “My Grandfather is Jewish. But I’m not.” It was a rare
mention of a family member; she never spoke to me about anyone else. The irony was teachers,
students, everyone associated with the after school program seemed to talk about nothing else.
Her father was legendary for his brash demeanor, as was her mother. Her two older siblings had
similarly set fire to the after-school program, only now they were in high school. I saw the
behavior inherent in Ellie during observations, but it would only manifest occasionally in media
class, where she seemed far more reserved and out of her element. In my observations she often
bragged about her family’s privilege, although I heard rumors this was overstated. Often, her
interview reflections were curt, or borderline rude: She elected for her “Right to Pass,” or told me
once, “I thought that we were going to be doing a little more media. Different than what we were
doing.” I honestly thought she hated the class until her final interview.
One of my interview questions was always: What was the worst thing about media class? That day Ellie told me, “The ending. Because I really liked it.” She went on to explain to me the insights she had garnered, including learning, “…how to express how I feel at different times – how I really feel – and being like, acting out how I really am.” She assured me that thinking about media had allowed her to think about how she could make her own media, and that was exciting because she liked, “…actually doing everything we wanted to do…doing what we wanted to do, being who we wanted to be.” I was disappointed our work together had to end, particularly considering her insights during the final Close Analysis activity had become quite strong. As we watched a commercial for the United States Marines, we dug into Question 4, “What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?” Her response, “You kinda saw the cool part of it, and not the violence.” It was one of the best answers produced that afternoon.

The Second Trend

Not only did my students enjoy the CML curriculum, they wanted more. More media, more working with media, more media class in general. Every single lesson I taught ended with a plea for something additional. Typical of the sentiment was this one, by one student, Gretchen, who said, “I thought media was fun today, but we were short on time. Next week I hope we can make a whole movie!” While projects involving media and technology could momentarily derail the lesson, I was routinely surprised by how deeply engaged students would become. When we were practicing our lighting techniques in lesson 3, constructing billboards in lesson 5 or recording podcasts in lessons 6 and 7, a typical warning like, “Two more minutes, media class,” would routinely be met by multitracked, “Nooooo’s!” In the final round of interviews, four of the seven students mentioned one concrete way to improve the experience would be to, “…make it a little bit longer so we had time to do more work with activities.” While CML does not dictate a prescribed time length for each of their lessons, in this after school setting my hour often felt slight.

I have come to believe that my students' zeal for “more” also explains much of their passion for the CML’s curriculum and media class in particular, as it was clear through their
classroom participation and interview answers that many students had previously experienced a media literacy movement-styled experience in school. From the very first lesson while doing the close analysis, many students exhibited facility answering Question 1, "Who created this message?" and Question 5, "Why was this message sent?" both hallmark learning outcomes of media literacy movement curriculum. "I thought media was what we did at school," another student, Sophie, explained in one of her interviews. She preferred the "media games," as she styled them, that allowed her and her classmates to not, "...just talk about media. I think that's boring." This was an essential conclusion that I will tease out further with trend number three.

I would be remiss without mentioning that through my classroom observations I noticed this trend was not limited to media class. Many of the students' favorite activities, including sports activities and more traditional arts, met with similar reactions. Interesting of note, for my research, was that reactions were not always consistent. For example, students who asked for "more" media class did not always seem as excited about traditional arts in the classroom. Additionally, students who asked for "more" sports were often the same students who requested more media class.

The exception to this trend was routinely those more critical areas of the curriculum. While this will be explored with greater specificity later in the chapter with the fourth trend, it is worth noting here the primacy of element one in Kellner and Share's (2007) triptych definition of critical media literacy. The clamoring to continue accompanied activity that expanded the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication and technologies, but often enthusiasm fell silent as lessons transitioned to analyzing relationships between media and audience, information and power. Similarly, media production was clearly thrilling, but not as a challenge for mainstream media texts or narratives. The question, therefore, lingers as to whether or not the fervor would persist for more critical critical media literacy curriculum.

Interview Subject #4, Lauren

Prior to my fourth lesson with media class, the assistant teacher in the after school classroom I was working in informed me that Lauren no longer wanted to participate. At the time this felt a surprise. For one thing, Lauren had been one of the most passionate participants in
media class, regularly speaking up, volunteering and engaging with the curriculum. In her interviews, she opined media class as, "...fun," following each of the first two lessons. Additionally, Lauren had, to that point, established herself as something of a follower in the classroom, and I was intrigued as to why she would choose to suddenly strike out on her own. For example, following Lillian’s introduction as Bob the Builder, Lauren immediately wanted to be known as “Fred.” In interviews and observations I had learned that Lauren was the youngest of several Caucasian, upper-middle class sisters who she routinely spoke about in glowing terms.

Looking back, though, the signs of discontent were obvious. Sure, the second media class was fun, but she preferred, "...the hands-on activity when I don’t have to sit there and look at an ugly Barbie Doll." (For our initial close analysis, we examined a Barbie commercial.). In conversation following the third media class, Lauren elected to invoke her “Right to Pass,” rather than reflect on her experience. When I was told Lauren didn’t wish to continue with media class, I asked that I have the opportunity to discuss the issue with her and she elaborated on this burgeoning theme. "All we ever do is sit around and talk!” Lauren told me, "We need more active stuff...or more games!” I asked Lauren if she had not enjoyed the interactive partner activity we had engaged with for much of our second class together or the camera activity during our third lesson. She explained that, no, "...I liked the one communication, two communication – where we had to draw the thing," but she wanted, "...more active things. Like the art things we did. More stuff like that.” This was certainly consistent with the behavior I had seen from Lauren prior to media class during my classroom observations. She explained that she had discussed the issue with her mother, a lawyer, she reminded me, and she needed to, "...speak up about stuff.” I asked her for one more chance to win her back. She told me she would "...think about it.”

The Third Trend

Lauren did come back for the fourth media class, but her chief concern proved not only a lingering one, but also an enduring outcome of the data I collected. Put simply, participants routinely championed the more experiential pedagogical aspects associated with the curriculum as opposed to those that were less interactive. Gretchen summed the impulse up well, following our hands-on lesson learning about visual language, when she said:
I think it was great because we actually...if you had just talked about this...I say this a lot...if you just talk about it...and we don't do anything and then...you just explain, “Blah, blah, blah, means blah, blah, blah, do you know what this means,” it gets boring and it's not as interesting! But if you play a game that you learn with it actually is more fun!

In fact, all seven of my interviewed participants mentioned something similar in their exit interviews, each listing the best, or their favorite, thing about media class as a project or interactive activity. It was not a surprise to me, as I had seen the outcome play out across the seven lessons, as well as my classroom observations.

During lesson 2, I saw my participants come alive during their partner activity involving one-way versus two-way communication. It was following this that Lauren disparaged Barbie, and Vadim informed me, “Media was fun today. I thought the funnest thing was the partner activity.” This pattern played out again with cameras in lesson 3, after which Ellie explained:

I liked it because if you just learn, “Ok, if you’re making media you should do this and that!” it’s not fun because you don’t do anything, you just listen to someone telling you how to do it and by the end of media class you don't remember.

I utilized this trend during lesson 4. An objective of the lesson was to, “Understand how personal experiences and biases influence the process of communication” (Share, Jolls & Thoman, 2007, p.43). In order to do this, the curriculum instructed me to show the students a “Live Event” and a “Mediated Event,” both which they would later, “Discuss the differences in how students interpreted the same event differently.” Instead of discussing, I chose to have my students play the roles of judge, lawyer and client. Rather than simply discussing their opinions as to whether or not interpretations following each viewing were “Deduced” or “Connoted,” we invented a game to allow the judge to decide. Afterward, Lauren seemed fairly satisfied:

It would be really boring if you just sat here and talked about media. But when we do stuff like watch movies, and act and stuff, it is much more exciting because we get to learn about it more...like know what it’s like...and step into other people’s shoes and think about what they would think.

Not only satisfied, Lauren seemed clearly cognizant of one of the lesson’s enduring understandings: Different people understand messages differently. It was therefore a positive distinction, for Lauren, this emphasis on experiential pedagogy as educationally helpful. It was a boon to my understanding of teacher instruction and assessment, evincing her requirements for deeper learning she could hold on to. The data from interviews, classroom observations, and
media lessons reflects that she was not alone.

Interview Subject #5, Ruben

Ruben's final project, his focus for lesson 6 and 7 which he worked on with Vadim, was on sushi. He was very familiar with the topic, he informed me, as he was born in Japan. During media class Ruben also bragged to the class he was something of a star in Japan, as he had once appeared on Japanese television. Nobody seemed to doubt the claim, as Ruben was quite a star in the after school program. He was quiet, yes, but everyone liked Ruben for his calm, kind demeanor. Inheriting nice physical characteristics from his Japanese parents also blessed him with a face you could easily imagine on TV. In my observations and in class, I saw Ruben often lean on this feature in a classic-cute-little-brother-kind-of-way. He would demure from tough questions, or make little jokes. Often he would insist he just, "didn't know," smiling his megawatt grin.

In my interviews with Ruben, he stated simply, again and again, that he was enjoying media class, but I found myself doubtful as to his garnering many of the learning outcomes beyond having a good time. When asked during one interview what he was learning, and how class could be improved, he told me, "I don't really know. Can we have a party?" But looking over our experiences together, particularly my observations of him both in media class and outside, I found that Ruben required time to process things, often with the support of the arts. I found Ruben to be a patient and focused particularly during lessons three and five when shooting video or drawing his billboard. These often led to more insightful comments during our discussions and interviews. When discussing visual language, for example, Ruben was one of the first in class to grasp lighting ("...like in scary movies!") and composition ("They kinda want to show where they are -- so they show like the background, with more than just the person").

In the aforementioned project from lesson six, he impersonated a sushi chef in his and Vadim's podcast. Listening to it, I couldn't help but find myself imagining Ruben when he was indeed older and one of the, "...finest chefs! With the finest menus! The finest menus in the entire world!" He certainly seemed to have the pieces in place, the imagination and the intensity. Like many young students, he simply requires the opportunity to allow his talents to blossom.
The Fourth Trend

Ruben was not the only student to occasionally stumble with learning objectives. Throughout the data collection process, I found that some of my students struggled to realize one or two of the stated learning objectives associated with each lesson. This is, of course, not a surprise but a fact faced by all educators. What made this finding distinct was that it was most often associated with those deeper and more “critical” understandings and objectives of the CML curriculum. When asked in exit interviews to explain what they had learned throughout media class, three of the seven students interviewed stated simply, “I learned about media.” When asked to clarify, they struggled to articulate what that meant beyond statements like, “Um...we...I don’t know. I think it’s good enough.” As already mentioned, Ruben responded by saying, “I don’t really know.” Additionally, not one interview subject mentioned in any exit interview any takeaways that included enduring understandings related to the relationship between media, power and identity.

The phenomenon was not limited to the summation. During lesson 2 students were able to clearly “List multiple forms of media,” and “Distinguish advantages and disadvantages of one-way and two-way communication,” two articulated objectives of the lesson, but struggled to, “Understand some of the limits and advantages of mass media communication,” (Share, Jolls & Thoman, 2007, p.15). In our reflection, I cut our discussion questions short, as students were unable to apply the implications of their activity to the topic of mass media. As we recounted the lesson the following week, students recalled talking, “…about one-way and two-way communication,” and little else beyond that facile takeaway. This research cannot suggest whether or not this inability to garner deeper understandings associated with mainstream media and its pedagogy of power is the result of my choices in lessons, a failure of those particular lessons or the developmental state of my participants. It can only confirm that this lesson remained apolitical. Further research will have to explore whether or not this would have been the case had the curriculum’s objectives gone farther, and, for example, attempted through creative, developmentally appropriate activities illustrated the advantage and ease with which mass media can communicate not only the messaging and sale of products, but also the “sale” of ideology.
Similarly, Lesson 3 presented a parallel pattern, as students quickly learned to, “Recognize choices that photographers make when taking pictures,” and could certainly, “Use three basic visual techniques to take pictures – camera angle, lighting and composition,” but were challenged to, “Understand how different aspects of a photograph can influence its meaning,” (Share, Jolls & Thoman, 2007, p.29). When opportunities were provided to compare the results of different visual language in photographs from our activity, common responses included, “It looks weird,” or “I thought it was cool.” Many were also lost when asked, “Has anyone seen that kind of lighting before?” or choice in composition, or camera angle. “Nope!” could be the response, or “Um….” By the end of the lesson, about half of my students began to apply these concepts in a successful way, but only about half. As with the last lesson, nothing in the media class approached the political perspective of how these media tools and language could, and routinely are, used to affect our most basic societal understandings of culture, race and gender through the many images we encounter each and every day.

Two more concepts thwarted the majority of students in lessons 5 through 7: The ability to “Analyze the values and lifestyles prompted in mass media,” (Share, Jolls & Thoman, 2007, p.63) and the ability to, “Develop understanding about how the purpose of a message shapes the message,” (Share, Jolls & Thoman, 2007, p.69). In lesson 5’s activity, students presented heroes and heroines through billboards of their design. In presenting these billboards to the class, they introduced their chosen celebrity’s personality, goals, and values they embody. In every instance, “values” was a concept that students struggled with. One group chose, as their celebrity, Michael Jackson, introducing him in this way during the lesson:

Lillian: His goal was to become a very famous singer.
Alan: And what were his values?
Lillian: What do you mean?
Alan: What did he stand for?
Lillian: He started when he was very young.
Sophie: He painted his face white.

As previously mentioned, during lesson 6 and 7 students created three different media texts, each representing a different purpose, or common reason, for communication: Information, persuasion
and entertainment. In this instance, groups also presented their work to the class with explanations as to which of the three purposes they utilized for each work, and why a particular medium was chosen (their choices were podcasts, posters, or video). Interestingly, in every presentation students inaccurately labeled one or more of their media works. Additionally, most often their media works were a blend of all three, obviously contributing to this confusion. As an example, one group choice to create media around a fictitious “Ear Wax Vacuum Cleaner 2000,” and their podcast, video and poster all were clearly informative, very entertaining and obviously aimed to persuade. Their podcast, aimed as a news report, ended with a pitch to, “…buy...the Ear Wax Vacuum Bag! And if you order now you get the airtight bag that lets no fumes out whatsoever! Please call the number....” Finally of note, none of the media productions were in any way the “alternative” productions envisioned by critical theorists, but rather clearly the reproductions critical media literacy is supposed to root out.

In the CML curriculum, Lesson 5a ends with the “Assessment Tip” that educators encourage independent thinking for students to, “…organize their ideas into the three traditionally basic categories of message motivation ...[but also] be encouraged and praised for finding and arguing for other motivations that don’t fit the basic three,” (Share, Jolls & Thoman, 2007, p.70). While this is not a stated objective, such discussion did not manifest with my students. Of research interest though, what was suggested by my students’ products and the classroom data instead was a blending of the three, or the notion that media today may in many ways evolved to a place where it can all be considered mass media. Additionally, student understanding of mass media is one that regularly mingles traditional paradigms of communication.

Interview Subject #6, Gretchen

In my class observations, Gretchen never stood out. This was corroborated by my discussions with the after school teachers, who knew less about Gretchen’s home life than they did about the vast majority of the rest of the class. Gretchen arrived each day with a nanny and tended to spend the rest of each afternoon blending in with a pack of girls, usually dominated by Lillian or Ellie. In fact, throughout the early lessons in media class, Gretchen would be regularly
drawn off topic by either of those stronger personalities, usually playing the role of the laughing sidekick. I was surprised then, at the end of lesson 3, when Gretchen began our interview with comments that would routinely prove to be some of the most astute in the class. Point of fact, over the remainder of the media experience, Gretchen would blossom into one of the most vocal and thoughtful students.

In this reversal in roles, it was Gretchen who led the class in championing the more experiential and interactive aspects of class as her preferred pedagogy. As previously mentioned, she became quite vocal in her buttressing of this bulwark, as when she proclaimed, if "...you just explain, 'Blah, blah, blah, means blah, blah, blah, do you know what this means,' it gets boring and it's not as interesting! But if you play a game that you learn with it actually is more fun!" In our exit interview, Gretchen also confirmed her strong understanding of the Five Questions, and her ability to utilize them in the exploration and analysis of all forms of media. This was little surprise, as Gretchen routinely remembered not simply all five questions, throughout the experience, but managed to apply them fairly appropriately throughout. While she told me she had not entered media class with any particular set of expectations other than to, "...just learn more about media," Gretchen, in my estimation, learned not only to, "...open up what you see and hear in videos," but, again, get to, in her words, "...go deeper," not simply into media, but also herself.

The Final Trend

While my fourth and fifth grade students failed to garner each and every learning objective, interview data, as well as the lesson recordings, suggest Gretchen was not the only student to successfully garner several deeper understandings throughout media class. In fact, throughout the seven lessons many students, at many different moments, exhibited critical takeaways that suggest that "learning about media," for these students, may mean more than a cursory understanding of how to "read" media. Rather, the CML curriculum seemed to provide some opportunities to begin to analyze and contextualize that reading and take away some critical understanding. Additionally, as I will mention in the subsequent conclusion to this Chapter, students like Vadim even began to "...take action," on these at least one of these ideas.
For Gretchen and others, the Five Key Questions did become a tool to analyze media. Question 2, for example, empowered students with the ability to break down media works into their creative techniques, as well as the authorial intention behind those creative choices. "I got excited!" Vadim explained during a close analysis, by watching not only "...the soldiers practicing things, but also the different camera views: sideways, diagonal, forward, backwards." Another student echoed this, chiming in, "...and the action packed music!" The comments, indeed, would build upon each other in this regard, as well as manifest in later lessons. As media class progressed, Lillian was able to grasp, "...when the Barbie came out of the box they had a close-up of the Barbie. Then the girl. She was delighted!" Teams also applied these understandings to their own media creations. Vadim and Ruben's sushi horror video, for one example, utilized monster lighting appropriately, as well as creative camera angles. In his exit interview, he explained, "I learned about...well, I don't just look at media and think: there's a billboard. Now I think – the elements of media."

Additionally, Questions 3 and 4, while not immediately intuitive to everyone, often clarified deeper understandings for the group by lessons' endings. Typical of such an exchange came at the end of our fourth lesson together, as students wrapped up their exercises around Question 3, how might different people understand this message differently?

Gretchen: ...the army video, if I lived in...let's say I'm older than I am now...and I lived when Pearl Harbor was bombed...I would feel like I had to support America.

Ruben: I do not want to join the army!

Ellie: [but] I would like to join the army to protect my fellow Americans. But not if I was from Sweden, it would be weird because that's not something I'm a part of.

The next lesson ended similarly, with presentations about Question 4, what values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? Using billboards they had prepared, the students were comparing media "heroes and heroines" with everyday ones. Examples included Harry Potter and George Lopez as media heroes and mom and dad as everyday heroes. But as one student pointed out to the group, "Most everyday people are not famous." They do not, "...stand for money." Another student agreed, pointing out that many of the brainstormed media personalities project values that include, "...drugs or remodeling their bodies." Lillian linked the discussion back to our previous lesson, reminding the group of the
Barbie commercial. "It was a lifestyle of a fancy house. The Barbie doll was maybe going to a fancy party. And the views: Sparkles and everything...." In her exit interview, Lillian appreciated these opportunities to, "...find things out [about media]...like if we were watching a video, you can stop it and explain what you are watching." It was a popular sentiment, along with an appreciation for the Five Key Questions.

And while, as mentioned, these questions and their curriculum may have merely empowered students to discover, "...what media is," that definition of media seemed to broaden over the course of the seven lessons. Sophie explained this in her final interview when she informed me, "...like media could be a lot of different things. Like everyday things." This essential expansion of media may reposition a banal learning outcome like "I learned what media is," to be one of the deeper outcomes desired by the Center for Media Literacy.

Interview Subject #7, Sophie

Sophie surprised everyone, myself included, during our fifth lesson together when she declared her favorite famous hero or heroine to actually be herself, because, "...I was in a commercial." This set off quite a tizzy across the classroom, as nobody had seemed to realize or know about Sophie's budding stardom in the way Ruben's had been so previously advertised. This was typical of my interactions with Sophie throughout media class and my observations. Comfortable sitting quietly in the background, she would very occasionally demand attention with a brazen idea or proclamation, most routinely something you had already heard from someone else. Not to suggest Sophie was lying about her acting appearance, for when media class demanded it, Sophie would regularly burst from her shell stage ready. Especially when it came to Vadim's "big idea."

In our final exit interviews together, several students inquired as to the possibility of their preparing a presentation for other after-school classrooms to explain what they had learned in media class. It was a sentiment that obviously reflects the philosophical underpinnings of the CML curriculum, but was not in any way suggested or prompted directly by any of our classroom lessons. Rather, unlike my experiences as a young person in Washington, this "lobbying" impulse was completely of the students' and by the students. Obviously exciting to
me, I promised to do what I could to provide the media class students with an opportunity.

While Vadim seemed like the chief architect of the endeavor, it proved for Sophie something of a “break-out” role. I was only able to set up one platform for the students, but this may have been for the best. In the end, only two students were brave enough to get in front of the other class and speak about their experiences in media class: Vadim and Sophie. They spoke for only seven and a half minutes, with Vadim giving Sophie an introduction. “We got to learn about media, what it is, some people think media is sciency stuff – but it’s really everything! Like posters, movies, podcasts. And you can make it!” He then cued Sophie, who gave a three minute impression of most every media class participant, including Vadim being loud, Ellie being bossy, Ruben shrugging his shoulders, and me asking the class to, “...stop touching the computer!” She then asked the class the five questions.

Sophie: Who was the author of this message?

One student: Chalutzim class!

Sophie: Raise your hand.

Another student: Chalutzim.

Sophie: No, media class! And what creative techniques did we use to get your attention? The questions were not all immediately answerable to the younger third grade students, but several of the official media class participants who had chosen to remain in the audience, rather than address the room, began to support with answers. One answer stood out, above the rest, answering Sophie’s final query as to why the message was being sent. It was a media class student I have not mentioned, as he was not a primary interview subject, but he participated joyfully throughout each lesson. He told the class, “Even third graders need to learn you can’t believe every media you see. They should think about it. And tell the second graders.”

Conclusion to Findings

This chapter has sought to present the findings of my piloting aspects of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit curriculum with elementary-aged, after school students. Through data analysis, I believe five themes emerged, including: 1) Students generally relished the curriculum, speaking glowingly about media class in not simply their interviews, but outside of
my structured research in their after school classroom, to teachers and to their parents about the excitement inherent in their experiences with the curriculum; 2) Students wanted more media literacy, including longer lessons and expanded curriculum, stating frequently in interviews, during lessons and in classroom observations that they would prefer additional opportunities with media class and the CML curriculum beyond those given to them within the structure of the study; 3) Students far preferred the more experiential and interactive elements of the curriculum, reacting positively to opportunities within the curriculum to learn through games and other learning strategies that had them “doing,” rather than “talking,” or “discussing.” The belief was complimented by the fact that students felt strongly that this type of pedagogy helped their learning far more than the alternative; 4) Students struggled to master several learning objectives throughout the experience, particularly those that related to critical understandings including the relationship between media, audience, power and values, an important element of any critical media literacy curriculum that seemed completely absent from the student takeaways gleaned from exit interviews, classroom observations and teacher assessment of individual lessons, and finally; 5) The curriculum did provide students with what I believe to be the beginnings of the basic skills necessary to allow them “read” and “write” media, as well as understand it more critically. In summary, therefore, the CML curriculum seemed for my students not as much an opportunity for an “aha,” but an “a-b-c.” Like learning to read for the first time, my students were often enthralled by the “newness,” and “excitement,” the “pictures,” and the “stories.” Their ability to begin to break “words” into “letters” was a skill they took pride in, and one that will undoubtedly lead to an increase in their “reading.” What remains unclear to me is whether or not the CML’s curriculum fosters a youth’s “reading” that ultimately includes the skills necessary to consistently understand media “texts” with a truly critical eye.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

Conclusion and Future Research

Throughout my experience implementing the CML’s Medialit Kit in an after-school setting, I often thought not simply about my research question and the experiences of the students with the curriculum, but imaginary interpretations of many of my aforementioned educational theorists also wrestling with the curriculum. For one, I frequently wondered not only what Counts would think about the lessons, but also his prophet of choice, Jeremiah. Indeed, what would Jeremiah think if he arrived on the scene, 2010 at a Jewish Community Center in an urban, west coast city, and entered the class I was teaching on media? More so, what would Jeremiah think if he was a student in media class? After much reflection, I like to believe he would respond in the same way God responded to him:

So you, gird up your loins, Arise and speak to them All that I command you. Do not break down before them, Lest I break you before them. I make you this day A fortified city, And an iron pillar, And bronze walls against the whole land... (Jeremiah 1:17, The New JPS Translation).

Many of us today, especially young people in urban areas of the United States in 2011, face a “whole land” of media in which we operate. To be a “fortified city,” an “iron pillar,” and “bronze walls” implies a learned ability to read and write this pervasive language of images, sounds and technology. To function in a media dominated world requires, first and foremost, a media literacy.

But not simply any media literacy: Jeremiah was not made merely a pillar, but an iron one. Not just any wall, but a bronze one. In my media class in which each and every group of participants conflated mass media messaging as a tool for delivering information, persuading and entertaining, young people today seem to me to require a critical media literacy which will empower them to not only read and write media, but interpret, digest and respond to a pervasive identity-shaping force that informs gender and cultural norms, and cajoles capitalistic tendencies, while all the while doing so in a package designed to enthral. In this regard, the CML curriculum
provides, if nothing else, a prophetic role for young people to begin the essential skill of critical reflection.

Alas, after seven weeks with the CML curriculum, my students were no critical patriots. In fact, many of them have not even garnered the "enduring understanding," that is the Five Questions. Learning to read, metaphorically, has not become a political act. Can the CML curriculum therefore even be considered true critical media literacy?

Despite Share's involvement and the word of Dunlop and Kymes (2007) this question will have to be plumbed by future researchers, with additional implementation strategies, additional lessons and additional populations, as my research would seem to position the curriculum more in the realm of the media literacy movement, than critical media literacy. This is not necessarily to indict the curriculum as a Trojan horse of "Big Media," as an organization like ACME accurately makes plain many media literacy curriculum are (ACME website), but rather to suggest a failure of the curriculum to inspire students to truly tackle critical issues.

Media is seductive. This seems an obvious conclusion given the subject matter, but one can just as easily position my first two findings as corroboration of this fact. Mainstream media demands such attributes to best accomplish its goal of selling, as mentioned earlier, everything from fluffy white toilet paper and bubble gum to an American capitalistic ideology, often times through the selfsame text. If these introductory CML lessons do not include the appropriate scaffolding for understanding concepts like values and power, or cannot effectively engage students in the understanding of these concepts, the curriculum may find itself apolitical through simple impotence. And while I did not implement the entire CML curriculum through my study, but rather only seven of the twenty-five lessons, what I did implement most often evinced this trait.

What does this suggest, therefore, about the future fostering and research into media-centered classrooms of illumination? Were I to repeat my study, I would look, first and foremost, to increasing the number of classes as many of the participants advocated for it. The opportunity to pilot the entire curriculum over the course of twenty-five weeks would far more authoritatively answer the above question regarding the curriculum's critical nature.
Additionally, we must pilot, in similar settings, newer curriculum being produced by
organizations like ACME as a comparison for these results. ACME maintains absolutely no
association, nor funding, from corporate media, separating themselves clearly from the media
literacy movement, as well as a top priority of "media reform," (ACME website), or a
democratization of the media from the hands of merely a few, corporations intent on selling their
agenda. We must explore this, and other, examples of media literacy curriculum as they emerge
to confirm whether or not it can effectively fulfill the mission of the critical media literacy
movement and allow young people to break the seductive mainstream media’s spell.

On the other hand, what seems clear to me about the CML curriculum is that in a
Freirean tradition, it did undoubtedly provide my students with the beginnings of a basic set of
skills. More so, it inspired this same set of students to both enjoy the experience of learning, and
energize them with a zeal for continued engagement. Further research will have to suggest the
effect these skill-building lessons have longitudinally on students’ lifestyles, attitudes and
behaviors. Does continued engaged with the CML curriculum provide students with the
opportunities to expand these foundational learnings into the political realm? How about over
the long haul, if 25 lessons one year became 25 more and 25 more for the next two? Only then, I
believe, can we begin to effectively reinforce the desired outcomes and achieve the desired goals.

Since my experience at fifteen, I have never been back to Washington, D.C. It took me
several years to even discover for myself the genesis of a personal commitment to positively
influencing the world, politically and spiritually, again. But my students in media class are
already asking for a sequel. Independent of media class, my same students began a project called
Tikkun el Mundo this past year. It was an opportunity for the entire after school program to get
involved with supporting, raising awareness about, and connecting with a village in post-
earthquake Haiti. They have begun asking whether or not another media class can occur this
year, and whether or not it can help them with Tikkun el Mundo. Vadim has assured me that,
“...many, many people,” will want to see their, “...Haitian friends,” and learn about their
experience.
I would like to help them. I would like to teach another media class during which we continue to practice our Five Questions with a diversity of media texts, until they roll of my students tongue like water. I would like to use a platform like Tikkun el Mundo, something experiential that they're engaged and excited about, to plumb the challenging depths Question Three and Question Four can go. In this regard, if nothing else, the CML's Media Lit Kit has been a buoy.
Appendix A

Lesson Plans

Media Lesson #1

1. Provide for Inclusion – Community Circle. Today we are going to begin our media class! As with our normal class, we will start with a Community Circle. Before we begin, it is important to remember our classroom agreements. They include: Attentive listening, Appreciation/No put-downs, Right to pass/Participate, and Mutual respect. Let’s model these agreements in our circle, as we provide everyone the opportunity to respond to the following question that will help us begin thinking about media: What is one TV, book, movie, or video game that you could not live without? Why?

2. Identify the Content Objective to be learned and the Collaborative Skill Objective to be practiced.

Content Objective: Students will be able to...

- Apply the Five Key Questions to a media ‘text.’
- Question how a media message is put together.
- Analyze the many interpretations that can derive from it.

Collaborative Skills:

- Listening attentively
- Reflecting on experience
- Thinking constructively

Social Skills:

- Listening

3. Identify the Strategy: ‘Close Analysis’

- Visuals. Show commercial. Ask students to get into small groups and brainstorm/write down everything they can remember about visuals—lighting, camera angles, how the pictures are edited together. Describe any people—what do they look like? What are they doing? Wearing? What scenes or images do you remember clearly? Focus only on what is actually on the screen, not your interpretation of what you saw on the screen. If necessary, play it again but with the sound off. Keep adding to your list of visuals.

- Sounds. Replay again with the picture off. Listen to the sound track. Write down all the words that are spoken. Who says them? What kind of music is used? Does it change in the course of the commercial? How? Are there other sounds? What is their purpose? Who is being spoken to—directly or indirectly? (That is, who is the audience addressed by the commercial?)
• **Apply Key Questions for Deconstruction.** With the third viewing, begin to apply the Five Key Questions and the Guiding Questions that lead to them.
  o 1. Who created this message?
  o 2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
  o 3. How might different people understand this message differently?
  o 4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
  o 5. Why is this message being sent?

• **Identify the author(s) and how the specific “construction” techniques you identified in steps 1 and 2 influence what the commercial is “saying”—values expressed and unexpressed; lifestyle endorsed or rejected; points of view proposed or assumed. Explore what’s left out of the message and how different people might react differently to it. What is the message “selling”? Is it the same as the produce being advertised?

• **Review Your Insights.** Summarize how the text is constructed and how various elements of the construction trigger our own unique response—which may be very different than how others interpret the text.

4. **Ask Reflection Questions** about what was learned.

  • Content: What did you notice about how this commercial was put together? What did you notice about how different people thought differently about the commercial?
  • Collaborative: When were we working well as a group? When could we have been working together better?
  • Personal: What did you think about this media lesson? What worked well? What could have worked better?

5. **Provide an opportunity for Appreciation.**
Media Lesson #2

1. Provide for Inclusion - Community Circle. Last week we began our media workshop! Today we will begin to dig into our special media questions. Last week we discussed how there were five; today we will learn more about question number one, 'Who created this message?' To begin, let's go around the circle with a question: Have you ever had a pen pal?

2. Identify the Content Objective to be learned and the Collaborative Skill Objective to be practiced.

Content Objective: Students will be able to...

- List multiple forms of media
- Distinguish advantages and disadvantages of one-way and two-way communication
- Understand some of the limits and advantages of mass media communication

Collaborative Skills:

- Participating fully
- Solving problems creatively
- Working on tasks together

Social Skills:

- Respecting

3. Identify the Strategy: 'Whole Class Introductory Discussion'

- Generate a list with students of different ways we communicate.
- Discuss the differences between one-way communication and two-way communication. Have students separate this list into one-way communication and two-way communication using a Venn diagram.
  - Which type of communication is most prevalent?
- Explain that we will be experimenting with one-way and two-way communication in order to understand the limitations of mass media compared with face-to-face communication.

'Partner Activity: One-Way vs. Two-Way Communication'

- In pairs, students sit back to back, one partner facing the board and the other facing the opposite direction without touching each other.
- Sender: This student is responsible for looking at the design at the front of the room and describing to his/her partner what to draw and how. Senders may not turn around and look at his/her partner's drawing or anyone else's drawing.
- Receiver: This student faces away from the front. His/her job is to listen to the sender's description and draw the design as instructed—without turning around or looking at the design at the front or at anyone else's drawing. He/she may not speak, ask questions or make any sounds or signals.
• Teacher shows a simple design on the board.
• Allow several minutes for senders to explain to receivers how to draw the
design. Senders may explain the design to their partners several times to make
sure they get all the details but they cannot receive any signals or questions to
guide them in what to say or how many times to explain the drawing.
• When everyone has finished the teacher covers the drawing while students,
without talking or showing their drawings, start a new sheet of paper.
• Teacher removes the cover and shows the same design again.
• This time, the sender tells his/her partner how to draw the design and the
receiver is allowed to speak and ask questions so that the communication goes
both ways. However, the receiver still may not look at the drawing in front or
at other people’s drawings.
• Using a similar but different design, have students switch roles so that everyone
experiences both positions of sending and receiving one-way and two-way
communication.

• Ask Reflection Questions about what was learned.

• Content: Compare the drawings and analyze the results of this experiment.
  o What are the advantages and disadvantages of predominantly one-
    way communication vs. two-way communications?
  o Go back to the Venn diagram: Which represent mass media?
  o When do media claim to offer two-way communication yet only
    offer a few more one-way choices?
  o Are letters to the editor in a newspaper two-way communication if
    the paper edits the letters and chooses which letters to publish or
    not?
  o Are talk shows two-way if the calls are screened?

• Collaborative: When were you and your partner working well as a team? When
  could you have been working together better?

• Personal: What did you think about this media lesson? What worked well?
  What could have worked better?

• Provide an opportunity for Appreciation.
Media Lesson #3

1. Provide for Inclusion – Community Circle. Question: Last week we learned more about our five media questions, specifically number one: Who created this message? Today we are going to learn more about number two: What creative techniques were used to attract my attention? Who has used a camera? Have you enjoyed it? Why or why not?

2. Identify the Content Objective to be learned and the Collaborative Skill Objective to be practiced.

Content Objective: Students will be able to...

- Recognize choices that photographers make when taking pictures.
- Understand how different aspects of a photograph can influence its meaning.
- Use three basic visual techniques to take photographs – camera angle, lighting and composition.

Collaborative Skills:

- Expressing appreciation
- Making responsible decisions
- Working on tasks together

Social Skills:

- Sharing

3. Identify the Strategy: ‘Introduction to Visual Images’

- Begin by creating awareness for visual images through brainstorming about the places where visual images can be found, such as photographs in magazines, books, and newspapers, TV, videos, and movies, even clothing and cereal boxes, etc. Ask students:
  - Where do we see messages that are not made up of words?
  - Do non-word messages have their own special kind of language?
- In order to understand visual language students need to learn three of the basic building blocks of visual language: camera angle, lighting and composition. They will take photographs and compare and contrast the differences they notice between each set of pictures.

‘Photo Exercise #1: Camera Angle’

- Ask the tallest and the shortest students to be the first models. Choose three other students to be photographers.
- Have the shortest student stand carefully on a chair and have the first photographer sit on the floor to take a picture looking up at him/her (low angle looking up).
- Have the tallest student sit on the floor and help the second photographer stand on a chair to photograph looking down at him/her (high angle looking down).

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• Finally, have the third photographer shoot a picture from eye level of both students standing side by side.
• Compare the photographs to discover how camera angle influences our perception of the person being photographed. Discuss when different camera angles are used on TV news, popular movies, or newspaper photographs.

'Photo Exercise #2: Lighting'
• Choose a volunteer to be the model and two students to be photographers. Have the model sit in a chair and use a bright light to shine up from below the model's face. Turn off the classroom lights to make the room darker. Lighting from below is called "monster lighting" and is often used in scary movies. This photographer should take the picture of the model's face at eye level.
• Next, change the light to come from above. Turn on the classroom lights since they also give light from above. Take this picture from the same camera angle as the last.
• Encourage students to compare the extreme differences in lighting and reflect on when they have noticed lighting in movies or photographs and how it makes them feel.

'Photo Exercise #3: Composition'
• Choose one student as the model and two students to take pictures. Have the model sit in a chair at the front of the class. The first photographer should take a photograph that is an extreme close-up. This means getting so close to the model that his/her entire face fills the frame and you can only see the eyes.
• Next, have the other photographer take a picture of the same model but from as far away as possible so we can see the model in the context of the whole room. This is often referred to as a wide shot.
• Have students compare these two compositions to see the differences between very close and far away. Often the close-up conveys intimacy, intensity or strong emotions while the wide shot gives context and space.

4. Ask Reflection Questions about what was learned.
   • Content: Challenge students to reflect on how they would use composition to convey different emotions for different parts of a favorite story.
   • Collaborative: How did we make responsible decisions during this lesson? How well did we work with our classmates at sharing our tasks?
   • Personal: What did you think about this media lesson? What worked well? What could have worked better?

5. Provide an opportunity for Appreciation.
Media Lesson #4

1. Provide for Inclusion – Community Circle. Question: So far we learned the first two of our five media questions: ‘Who created this message?’ and ‘What creative techniques were used to attract my attention?’ Today we are going to dig into the third: ‘How might different people understand this message differently?’ Who has traveled to another country? Has anyone watched foreign TV? What can you remember?

2. Identify the Content Objective to be learned and the Collaborative Skill Objective to be practiced.

Content Objective: Students will be able to...

* Experience different ways of understanding events in our lives.
* Build empathy toward different points of view.
* Understand how personal experiences and biases influence the process of communication.

Collaborative Skills:

* Reflecting on experience
* Thinking constructively
* Making responsible decisions

Social Skills:

* Empathizing

3. Identify the Strategy: ‘Live Event’

* Stage an event in which all the students witness the same situation. Make it short but exciting. For older students, have an administrator appear in the classroom to strongly reprimand the teacher about his/her clothing or appearance in front of the whole class.
* Immediately after the event, stop whatever the class is doing and have students write down everything they just saw and heard. They will want to talk about it but ask them to write first.
* Ask for volunteers to share their writing. Have students listen for adjectives and descriptions that differ between students. Also focus on what may be missing in each person’s report—or that may have been written down but did not happen.
* Discuss the differences in how students interpreted the same event differently. Ask students to explain how it is possible to have different accounts of the same event.
* Brainstorm and chart all student ideas about what makes humans different and could possibly contribute to our different interpretations of the same event. This list should include many items such as: gender, religion, ethnicity, class, age, health, etc.
‘Mediated Event’

- **Show the class a short video clip or a visual image with no discussion before or afterwards.** Try to find a video clip that is out of the ordinary and not from the students’ culture. Ask the students to watch without commenting.
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=un-MUeDv5e0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=un-MUeDv5e0)
- **Make sure students do not talk** about the video clip prior to writing or during their writing. The goal is to get their own interpretations without being influenced by others.
- **After viewing, have students write down** everything they saw and heard in order to retell the story.
- **Once all have finished writing,** students swap papers. They read their partner’s paper and *underline* all the bits of the story that they could actually see or hear.
- **Next, have students circle** anything they find that is interpretive, things that were not seen or heard in the video but were DEDUCED or CONNOTED from the message.

4. **Ask Reflection Questions** about what was learned.

- **Content:** What was interpreted in the paper that was never seen or heard. Ask:
  - Where did those interpretations come from?
  - What things were omitted?
  - Did any of our prejudices, biases, or personal experiences surface?
- **Collaborative:** How did we think constructively in this lesson? How did our discussions help in this process?
- **Personal:** What did you think about this media lesson? What worked well? What could have worked better?

5. **Provide an opportunity for Appreciation.**
Media Lesson #5

1. Provide for Inclusion – Community Circle. Question: So far we learned the first three of our five media questions: 'Who created this message?' 'What creative techniques were used to attract my attention?' and 'How might different people understand this message differently?' Today we are going to dig into the fourth: 'What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?' Who has a favorite actor or actress? What do you love about them?

2. Identify the Content Objective to be learned and the Collaborative Skill Objective to be practiced.

Content Objective: Students will be able to...

- Identify characteristics of a hero and heroine.
- Compare media role models to real life people.
- Analyze the values and lifestyles promoted in mass media.

Collaborative Skills:

- Participating fully
- Valuing diversity of culture/ideas
- Working on tasks together

Social Skills:

- No Put-Downs

3. Identify the Strategy: ‘Discussing Heroes/Heroines’

   - Many of today's role models and heroes are characters that students see on TV or in the movies. Ask the students to help you generate a list of the TV or movie characters they look up to or admire. These could be fictional such as a character from a drama or sitcom or real people such as Oprah Winfrey or a sports star.
   - Ask students to look at the list quietly and select two names from the list that they would call a "hero" or "heroine."

‘Dissecting Media Heroes/Heroines’

- Put students in teams of two to discuss their combined list of heroes/heroines. After hearing each other, they should select one media hero or heroine from their combined list and draw a picture of this person on their poster paper. They should analytically dissect their hero/heroine by writing on their drawing the answers to the following questions.
  - What does he/she look like (eyes, hair, height, weight, etc.)
  - What type of personality does he/she have? (funny, sensitive, kind, tough, rude, giving, etc.)
  - What are his/her goals? (save lives, make money, win games, make friends, etc.)
  - What values do they embody—either explicitly by words and language or implicitly by looking or behaving in a certain way.
• **Student teams should present their posters** and discuss the values that their hero/heroine represents.

'Reality Check'

• **Have students repeat the exercise** but this time list names of real people in their school, family, or community whom they consider to be a hero/heroine. Make a similar poster about them and their traits.

4. **Ask Reflection Questions** about what was learned.

• **Content**: As a final analysis, have students compare their media hero/heroine to their real life hero/heroine. This can be done as:
  - A Venn Diagram.
  - A written essay.
  - An oral discussion.

• **Collaborative**: How well did we value each other's ideas and opinions? How well did we practice our agreement to not use Put-Downs? Let's talk about examples of

• **Personal**: What did you think about this media lesson? What worked well? What could have worked better?

5. **Provide an opportunity for Appreciation**.
Media Lesson #6

1. Provide for Inclusion – Community Circle. So far we learned the first four of our five media questions: ‘Who created this message?’ ‘What creative techniques were used to attract my attention?’ ‘How might different people understand this message differently?’ and ‘What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?’ Today we are going to dig into the fifth, ‘Why is this message being sent?’ To get us thinking about this, here is a question for the circle: Think about your day yesterday, from when you woke up, to when you went to sleep. What different kinds of media did you interact with?

2. Identify the Content Objective to be learned and the Collaborative Skill Objective to be practiced.

Content Objective: Students will be able to...

• Identify the three common reasons for communication: information, persuasion and entertainment.
• Create media messages for different purposes.
• Develop understanding about how the purpose of a message shapes the message.

Collaborative Skills:

• Listening attentively
• Reflecting on experience
• Working on tasks together

Social Skills:

• Sharing

3. Identify the Strategy: ‘Extracting Student Knowledge’

• Begin a class discussion about the different reasons people have for communicating. Generate a list of their reasons by asking the following questions:
  o Why do people talk?
  o Why do you think people write, take pictures, make movies, play music?
  o Why do people put messages on clothing, posters, flags, bumper stickers, milk cartons, medicine bottles, advertisements, etc.?

‘Organizing and Classifying’

• Explain that some scholars who study communication have traditionally identified three common categories as reasons why people communicate
  o To inform
  o To persuade
  o To entertain
• **Have students work in teams** to separate the class list of reasons that they generated into these three basic categories. Some messages may have several purposes and some might not fit any of the three categories. For the messages that don't fit the three basic reasons, create a fourth category that for the time being can be labeled, *miscellaneous*.

• **Discuss the choices the teams made** and check for class consensus. If issues arise in which agreement is difficult, use the miscellaneous category as a positive opening to demonstrate that there are more than just three reasons but these three are very common.

'Creating Messages for Multiple Purposes'

• **Have each team choose any topic of interest** and challenge them to create three media texts that transmit a message about their topic for three different purposes. For example:
  
  o If they choose football, they could create an advertisement to **persuade** boys to join a football league, then a wall poster to **inform** people about the rules of football, and finally a cartoon to **entertain** others about some aspect of football.

4. **Ask Reflection Questions** about what was learned.

  • Content: To conclude the activity, have teams present their three messages and how each message accomplishes the goal. With each presentation have all students consider:
    
    o **Are there still other possible motivations behind each poster/message?**

  • Collaborative: How well did we work in teams during our media productions? What are examples of great teamwork? How can our teamwork have been improved?

  • Personal: What did you think about this media lesson? What worked well? What could have worked better?

5. **Provide an opportunity for Appreciation.**
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