PREPARING EDUCATORS TO TEACH CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

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This essay explores the need to prepare educators to teach their students to think critically about the media and information they use and encounter daily so they can become empowered citizens with a sense of agency to use these tools to participate in shaping democracy. After reviewing the dearth of teacher training in media education, the author describes his experiences teaching a graduate-level course for preservice and working teachers in critical media literacy. This course is based on a theoretical framework from cultural studies and critical pedagogy that expands the notion of literacy to include multiple types of texts as well as deepens the critical analysis to question the connections between information and power.

INTRODUCTION

Today's youth are immersed in a world in which media and technology have entered all aspects of their lives and society, yet few teacher education programs are preparing teachers to help their students to critically understand the potential and limitations of these changes. It is crucial that new teachers learn *how* to teach their K–12 students to critically read and write everything, from academic texts to social media.

This means that schools of education responsible for training the new wave of teachers must be up-to-date, not just with the latest technology, but more importantly, with critical media literacy theory and pedagogy in order to help teachers and students to think and act critically, with and about, information communication technology, media, and popular culture. Unfortunately, there are few teacher education programs anywhere in the world that are teaching this (Hobbs, 2007). In Canada, where media literacy is mandatory in every grade from 1–12, most new teachers are not receiving media literacy training in their preservice programs (Wilson & Duncan, 2009). Researchers investigating media education in the United Kingdom (the place where many of the ideas about media literacy first emerged) found that many teachers are unprepared to teach media education and "there is only

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limited training available to prepare schoolteachers for teaching about the media" (Kirwan, Learmonth, Sayer, & Williams, 2003, p. 51). Hobbs (2007) reports, "Until recently, only a handful of universities and colleges around the world have offered formal undergraduate or graduate-level coursework in this area."

While it is difficult to know for sure who is and who is not teaching critically about media and technology (Mihailidis, 2008), there seems to be an increase in media literacy courses in higher education in the United States (Stuhlman & Silverblatt, 2007). As technology and media continue to evolve and move into more public and private spaces, more educators are recognizing the need for training new teachers about media literacy (Domine, 2011; Goetze, Brown, & Schwarz, 2005; Hobbs, 2007; Schwarz, 2001) and some are even addressing the need to teach about critical media literacy (Flores-Koulish, Deal, Losinger, McCarthy, & Rosebrugh, 2011; Luke, 2000; Robertson & Hughes, 2011). In 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a curriculum guide online in ten different languages for training teachers in media education (Grizzle & Wilson, 2011), "thereby underlining that teacher training in media and information literacy will be a major challenge for the global education system at least for the next decade" (Pérez-Tornero & Tayie, 2012, p. 11).

This challenge is especially significant in the United States, where media education is growing, yet still an anomaly; only a handful of universities offer more than a single course and most do not even offer that (Goetze et al., 2005). Schwarz (2001) asserts that because of the power of emerging literacies, "Teacher education needs media literacy as an essential tool and an essential topic in the new millennium" (pp. 111–112). She calls for integrating media literacy across all subject areas of teacher education "from methods courses and educational psychology to foundational courses and student teaching" (p. 118). This interdisciplinary approach for media education could be easier now for K–12 teachers in the United States since the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require literacy to be taught and technology to be used across the curriculum (CCSS California, 2013).

UNESCO takes an approach to media education that combines media and information literacy. Carolyn Wilson (2012) explains that media and information literacy includes many competencies, from learning about and using information communication technologies to

> the ethical use of media, information and technology, as well as participation in democratic and intercultural dialogue. Media and information literacy is both a content area and way of teaching and learning; it is not only about the acquisition of technical skills, but the development of a critical framework and approaches. (p. 16)

Combining information and technology and media-cultural studies is essential, but still infrequent. Within the current wave of educational reform that prioritizes the newest technology and career readiness over civic engagement and critical inquiry, schools are more likely to adopt only information technology or information literacy, and not media education. Goetze et al. (2005) report:

> While a growing number of states offer certification in educational technology, media literacy remains rare even when the word "media" is used in describing required courses. Most college teacher education programs require courses like *Media and Microcomputers in the Classroom* (offered at the University of Kansas), but such courses involve a mostly technical "how-to" orientation, not critical thinking about the media. (p. 169)

TEACHER EDUCATION AT UCLA

When I began working in the Teacher Education Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2007, there was very little inclusion of media or technology instruc-

tion. The little there was focused on helping students use technology as if the tools were neutral, without consideration of the ways technology and media shape students' uses and understandings. During this time, we were going through the 8-year accreditation process and had been receiving credit for meeting the California Teaching Commission's technology requirements (Standard 11: *Using Technology in the Classroom*) based on minimal technology training. Standard 11 requires that preservice candidates be familiar with basic technology literacy, as well as legal and ethical issues related to using technology in a classroom, such as safety, security, copyright, and acceptable use (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009). The requirements from the state expected more than we were providing, so we used this opportunity to create a new course for all our students that would meet the state's requirements and the mission of our program: "to transform public schooling to create a more just, equitable, and humane society" (UCLA Center X Mission Statement, 2016). We incorporated the material required by the California Teaching Commission along with ideas from cultural studies and critical pedagogy to create the first critical media literacy course in the teacher education program.

ED466: CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY FOR TEACHERS

The course, Ed466, was officially approved in 2011, and since then, about 150 teacher education students have taken this four-unit class each year in order to earn their California State Teaching Credential (UCLA Center X website, 2016). More than half of the students are people of color and nearly 75% are women. The program offers several pathways, including a residency option and a 2-year joint master's degree and teaching credential certification for candidates earning their multiple subjects, or secondary math, science, English, or social studies credential. Ed466 is also offered annually as an elective to about a dozen working teachers in the master's only cohort.

The course has been highly popular with students, receiving consistently strong scores on the end-of-quarter student evaluations. Many students have commented about applying lessons and ideas from the class immediately in their classrooms or student teaching. One student reflected in an anonymous course evaluation, "This was an amazing, thought-provoking and fun course with the perfect balance of theory and practice. Every night we left with practical lessons to try with our class, and a solid knowledge of the theory and readings behind them" (UCLA EIP, 2012).

Beginning with a theoretical overview, the course explores the development of media education from cultural studies to the way that it is now defined, less as a specific body of knowledge or set of skills, and more as a framework of *conceptual understandings* (Buckingham, 2003). While many media literacy organizations have their own list of essential ideas (Canada's Ontario Ministry of Education's *Eight Key Concepts*, British Film Institute's *Signpost Questions*, Center for Media Literacy's *Five Core Concepts and Key Questions*, National Association for Media Literacy Education's *Six Core Principles*, and the Action Coalition for Media Education's *Ten Basic Media Education Principles*), most share a handful of basic commonalities:

1. recognition of the construction of media and communication as a social process as opposed to accepting texts as isolated neutral or transparent conveyors of information;
2. textual analysis that explores the languages, genres, codes, and conventions of the text;
3. exploration of the role audiences play in negotiating meanings;
4. problematizing the process of representation to uncover and engage issues of ideology, power, and pleasure;
5. examination of the production and institutions that motivate and structure the

media industries as corporate profit-seeking businesses (Kellner & Share, 2007).

In order to provide a critical pedagogical approach to teaching, these conceptual understandings are incorporated with feminist theory and critical pedagogy to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power (Carlson, Share, & Lee, 2013; Garcia, Seglem, & Share, 2013). To simplify these abstract ideas of critical media literacy into accessible language for teachers to use in the classroom, we use the list of six conceptual understandings and questions presented in Table 1 (Funk, Kellner, & Share, 2016).

These six conceptual understandings and questions are referred to regularly throughout the course and are addressed in all lesson plans. It is important for teachers to understand the concepts and questions because theory should inform practice. However, it is better for K–12 students to learn to ask the *questions* rather than memorize the concepts, since the questions, with appropriate guidance, can lead students on a path of inquiry where they are more likely to experience the concepts. In her final reflection from the course, Araz Keshishian (2013), an eighth-grade English teacher, comments:

> In "teacher school" we are often taught many things that are great in theory, but do not lend themselves well to practice … this class was definitely an exception.… In ELA [English language arts], the CCSS are centered around analysis and evidence, and critical media literacy is just that! In fact, it is so relevant to my class that I am kicking off my second semester with a Critical Media Literacy Unit! For years, I have been teaching my students to read critically, looking at point of view, author's purpose, context and so forth, but by applying the core concepts, I am equipped with the tools to teach them how to view THEIR world with a critical eye**.**

In the *Critical Media Literacy* course, full-time teachers working on their master's degree and preservice teachers earning their teaching credential and master's degree use cameras, computers, cell phones, and tablets to explore their communities in search of connections

TABLE 1
Conceptual Understandings

	Conceptual Understandings	*Questions*
1.	**Social Constructivism**: All information is coconstructed by individuals and/or groups of people who make choices within social contexts.	**WHO** are all the possible people who made choices that helped create this text?
2.	**Languages/Semiotics**: Each medium has its own language with specific grammar and semantics.	**HOW** was this text constructed and delivered/accessed?
3.	**Audience/Positionality**: Individuals and groups understand media messages similarly and/or differently depending on multiple contextual factors.	**HOW** could this text be understood differently?
4.	**Politics of Representation**: Media messages and the medium through which they travel always have a bias and support and/or challenge dominant hierarchies of power, privilege, and pleasure.	**WHAT** values, points of view, and ideologies are represented or missing from this text or influenced by the medium?
5.	**Production/Institutions**: All media texts have a purpose (often commercial or governmental) that is shaped by the creators and/or systems within which they operate.	**WHY** was this text created and/or shared?
6.	**Social Justice**: Media culture is a terrain of struggle that perpetuates or challenges positive and/or negative ideas about people, groups, and issues; it is never neutral.	**WHOM** does this text advantage and/or disadvantage?

with math, science, and social studies, to reflect on their personal identities, to express their feelings and thoughts, to tell stories, to collaborate, and to challenge dominant ideologies. Through various lessons, students demonstrate their competence with digital media as well as their understanding of the politics of representation. The course involves lectures and assignments structured to integrate technology, popular culture, and media analysis as well as production so that students not only critically analyze and become better readers, but also learn to create with these new tools and become 21st century writers. This expanded notion of literacy tends to resonate with many who have grown up playing and socializing regularly with media and technology as they find it more culturally relevant than just print-based literacy.

The challenge is to combine this expansive view of literacy with a deeper exploration of the ever-present connections between information and power. The more critically empowering aspect of the class is the engagement with ideology, power, and identity in the literacy process. This deeper analysis and use of literacy as a tool for civic participation emphasizes the essential role that literacy can play in social justice education.

LECTURES AND ACTIVITIES

With many instructors teaching this course to different groups of students (experienced teachers earning their master's degree and preservice teachers working in all levels from preschools to high schools and teaching all subjects), each class is unique. Since the developmental levels and social needs are so distinct between primary and secondary school students, we[1] try to differentiate the course for their teachers and still cover the same content described below.

One of the initial activities students engage in is to create a visual poster about somebody in the class whom they do not know well. For this assignment, students visually represent a peer without showing the person's face or name. They interview their colleague for just five minutes in class and then for homework they create a poster about her/him using only visual imagery: photographs (of anything but the person's face), drawings, logos, et cetera. The following week, they display their posters for everyone to see in a gallery walk. During the debrief, students discuss what it feels like to be represented visually as well as how it feels to represent somebody else using only images. For some, this is challenging, as they visually generalize qualities of their peers while trying to avoid stereotypes. This leads to conversation about critical media literacy conceptual understanding #4 (Politics of Representation) and the ways images in media often stereotype groups of people.

Wanted Posters

The following assignment requires students to produce a more involved poster using images, words, and various elements of design. Students are tasked with creating a *wanted poster* that visually represents something they are teaching. This is intended to integrate media into the curriculum in order to make subject matter more engaging while also teaching computer literacy, visual literacy, and critical media literacy. This assignment is an opportunity to see how to take any lesson they are teaching and integrate media and technology with images and sparse text to create a media product that authentically demonstrates content matter understanding. As teachers create their wanted posters, they see that anything can be the subject matter (math formulas, scientific concepts, books, letters, numbers, historical events, and even people).

The wanted posters become class projects, and like all good project-based learning, the *process* of creating the product is where most of the learning occurs. We emphasize this understanding so that teachers do not fall into the common trap of overvaluing the final product at the expense of the educational process. The task also serves as an introduction to basic

technology skills such as inserting an image into a Word document, using Word Art for a title, including a border, and adding text boxes—a *description* and a *warning*. The assignment requires teachers and students to think about visual literacy and consider typography (type of font, color, size), photography, illustration, composition, and design (conceptual understanding #2: Languages/Semiotics). In order for students to *transmediate* (Cappello & Hollingsworth, 2008) the information they are learning into visual language, they need to synthesize the ideas into a single image, title, and brief text that will describe it and warn the reader about it.

The wanted posters that the new teachers create become original examples for their own students to see digital alternatives for demonstrating learning and the potential for reframing discourse about whose story is seen and heard in the classroom. While the wanted poster can simply be a way of retelling information, it can also become a more critical media literacy tool for creating media about ideas, people, and events that have been misrepresented or underrepresented in textbooks and popular culture. Verma Zapanta, a social studies student teacher, created a wanted poster of Gabriela Silang, an indigenous woman in the Philippines who led her people in armed resistance against colonial domination. When teachers and students have the opportunity to produce their own representations, they can appropriate the power to determine whose stories are told and how. The wanted poster is one of the most common assignments from the course that is taken directly into the classroom where elementary and secondary students create their own posters. It is an activity that can be done with computers to integrate technology skills with subject matter learning, as well as with just paper and markers in schools with limited access to technology. Toni Siciliano (2012), a second grade teacher, explains in her final reflection that she had her students create wanted posters for one of the characters in their literacy unit:

> One of my favorite wanted posters that had been created was from a student who had been retained and doesn't complete anything. He created this poster of "The Black Cowboy" and his reward said "one ticket into heaven to meet up with the animals he loved so much." He was so proud of himself and couldn't wait to put it up in the class.

Through Others' Eyes

As teachers and students recognize the power of visual representations, we problematize the process to reflect on negative media portrayals they find of themselves. Students use Voicethread.com, an online social media site, to create their *Through Others' Eyes* assignment that involves posting and commenting about an image of an aspect of their identity that they have seen maligned in the media. Voicethread provides the opportunity for students to see and hear each other's reflections, and to add comments to their peers' postings. In addition to providing experience with more sophisticated technology than the simple manipulation of images and text in the wanted poster, this assignment requires students to critically analyze media representations and push back at the messages that saturate their world. In doing so, students have critiqued the portrayal of body image, immigration, domestic violence, alcoholism, religion, stereotypes, and the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. These critiques help students explore the influence of visual images and the deep connection that media can have with power and identity, especially when representations are negative (conceptual understanding #6: Social Justice). Amaris Leiataua (2013), a secondary social studies preservice teacher, describes the impact of this assignment for her:

> Of all the projects we had to complete, the Voicethread assignment was the most powerful for me. This assignment gave me the opportunity to reflect on how my identity as a Pacific Islander womyn is negatively portrayed in the media. Even though I had

> already known my colleagues for a quarter, I was still hesitant to share something this vulnerable with them. After spending lots of time writing up a script and recording the voice over at least a dozen times before publishing it, I finally shared it. In response to my Voicethread, many people told me that they loved it and respected it or could resonate with what I expressed. This was an amazing experience to be able to connect with other peers who I thought I would never have anything in common with. They were very supportive. The stories that other people told also increased my awareness of their identity and made me respect them even more.

This assignment has often opened dialogue for addressing microaggressions (Sue, 2010) that too often go unseen by those who are not the targets. One example was created about the Mexican LEGO toy that generalizes all Mexicans as wearing the large hat and a serape and holding maracas, something one Latino student used to explain that when he hears the comment, "you look Mexican," it always carries a negative connotation. It is common during class and in the online forum discussions for students to voice their surprise about the different Voicethread postings as concepts/ideas they had never thought about before. These discussions often become *courageous conversations* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) that need to be facilitated with respect and support. One of the biggest challenges for some students is to recognize the roles that power, privilege, and ideology play in determining the difference between individual acts of discrimination and social systems of oppression. Johnson (2006) explains that individualistic thinking "makes us blind to the very existence of privilege, because privilege, by definition, has nothing to do with individuals, only with the social categories we wind up in" (p. 77).

IDEOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

After experiencing their own issues of misrepresentation, students explore theoretical foundations of ideology and cultural studies. We begin with a heterosexual questionnaire for each student to answer independently and reflect on her or his ideas about sexuality from a perspective that challenges heterosexuality as the norm. A couple of questions are: "What do you think caused your heterosexuality? Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?" (Rochlin, 1995). While some students laugh and some express discomfort, this questionnaire sets the tone for the class with a challenge to dominant ideas that are too often represented as "normal" in commercial media. The goal of this session is to disrupt dominant ideologies and expose them as social constructions, something that is often difficult for people who have not considered their social categories as privileges. By discussing the *Through Others' Eyes* postings, students see numerous examples of the ways that media privilege some at the expense of others. We connect the discussion with readings and further examples about ideology that highlight the notions of *naturalizing* and *othering* (Funk et al., 2016; Hall, 2003).

Numerous examples are provided to deconstruct "commonsense" assumptions of languages, labels, and even maps. One of the best examples we view is a video clip from *The Colbert Report* (Colbert, 2009) on Comedy Central in which Stephen Colbert uses humor to explain the "Neutral Man's Burden." This is a clever use of satire to demonstrate how the appointment of a Latina to the U.S. Supreme Court will destroy the neutrality of the Court that has for years been predominantly White, male, and as Colbert reports, "neutral." We follow up this viewing with a metaphor of riding a bicycle in the wind to demonstrate how when the wind is helping you, most people do not notice it (like when you benefit from dominant ideologies). However, when the wind is blowing in your face and making riding the bicycle more difficult, most people feel the wind and recognize the problems it is creating (like the ability to recognize structures of oppression when you do not benefit from the dominant ideologies). We encourage students to question the way dominant ideologies func-

tion to favor certain beliefs over others, which more often than not are ideas that benefit the groups having the most privilege. Marx and Engels wrote in 1846, "in every epoch, the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class" (1970, p. 64). Understanding the way ideologies are reproduced in media helps students connect conceptual understanding #1 (Social Constructivism) with #4 (Politics of Representation) to interrogate issues of racism, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, and environmental justice, since all media messages are constructed within hierarchies of power.

Freire and Macedo (1987) remind us that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 35). Many of the activities and lectures in this critical media literacy course situate youth engagement, dialogue, and pedagogical reflection within the lived experiences that each student brings to the classroom. A focal point for the lessons is deliberative reflection on how ideologies stem from the cultural readings of our virtual, mediated, and physically experienced world. In her final reflection for Ed466, secondary school math teacher Monica Padilla (2013) states:

> As a Latina who attended urban public schools I am still struggling with insecurities that are a direct result of growing up in a marginalized community. Thanks to this program and this class I know that I can and must change that for my students. I want to empower my students to become active, critical participants in the creation of their own knowledge.

Race and Gender

Feminist standpoint theory offers an important theoretical lens for critical media literacy because it explains how beginning inquiry from a subordinate position can increase the likelihood of seeing the dominant ideology (Harding, 2004). As we explore the politics of representation, we address issues of race and racism in media using Afro-Media literacy (Byard, 2012). This framework, developed by Shani Byard, guides students to question the dominant structures that have for centuries shaped the way race and racism have been constructed to benefit some groups of people at the expense of others. A powerful documentary that provides significant historical context about the social construction of race and racism is the BBC's *Scientific Racism: The Eugenics of Social Darwinism* by David Olusoga (Daniels, 2013). Using the lens of Afro-Media Literacy reveals the historical connections among imperialism, colonialism, science, slavery, and colorism with current portrayals of African Americans in news media and popular culture. The history of eugenics and scientific racism remains unknown to many students in the U.S., even though it still informs much popular discourse and media messages (Rendall, 2014).

While we study the ways in which many groups of people suffer from racist ideologies, we also focus specifically on African American and Native American experiences, since they continue to be the groups most heavily impacted by overt racism, disproportionate rates of incarceration and violence, deficit thinking, and racial microaggressions. One revealing activity we do in class involves going online to eBay.com and searching "collectable Americana." Every time we have visited this website, we have found people buying and selling racist images and items of African Americans. We also discuss Orientalism, anti-Semitism, racism against Latinos and Asians, the model minority myth, and the intersections of all these stereotypes with gender, class, sexual orientation, and numerous other identity markers. This exploration of the social construction of race and racism helps demonstrate how the repetition of racist ideology contributes to racial microaggressions that are now less overt, but still highly damaging.

The media production assignment for this session requires students to work collaboratively to create a *racial myth-busting meme*. Students search cyberspace for a media image they feel is racist and then repurpose it into a meme that challenges the racism of its mes-

sage. Even though there are numerous free meme creators online and plenty of search engines that can help students find racist images, this assignment is not easy, as it requires high-level thinking skills and creativity to produce a meme that in just a few words can challenge racism. Again, it is the process and not the product that produces the best learning. In this case, many of the final products that students struggled with the most generated the best discussions and the most lessons learned.

It is important for students to understand that literacy is a process that requires analysis as well as production, reading and writing. In order to be media literate, students must learn to critically read messages as well as create them. It is often through the process of making media that students deepen their critical understandings and develop a sense of empowerment by producing counternarratives or telling stories rarely heard. Student teacher Lizzette Mendoza (2016) writes in her final reflection:

> In this class, I thought deeply about how I am represented in the media, as a woman of color. These were ideas I have always thought of in passing, but did not delve into very deeply very often because they bother me a lot and many times I am not sure what to do with that anger and frustration. I saw that I can challenge those images by creating my own media and sharing it with students and peers.

In the following session, we move our focus from race to gender to compare and contrast representations of women and men in commercial media. Using constructivist pedagogy, we start with student input by having the class create two large collages on the classroom wall. Students rip out and tape on the wall pictures from popular magazines that they feel are typical of how women and men are most often represented in commercial media. Once the collages are complete, students discuss what they notice about the similarities and differences between the representations of men and women. This discussion is followed up with video excerpts from Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly 4* on images of women in advertising and Jackson Katz's *Tough Guise 2* on media representations of violent masculinity. The different perspectives and the media examples they provide add depth to the classroom discussion. We also go online and use an interactive tool for seeing and hearing different ways gender is constructed to sell toys to children. The Gender Advertising Remixer app (http://www.genderremixer.com) allows anyone to remix toy commercials by overlaying the sound track from commercials targeting girls with visual images of commercials targeting boys, or vice versa. This app was created by Jonathan McIntosh in 2010 and he has continued to update it with the help of others and fair use. The Gender Advertising Remixer and the gender collages work well with university graduate students and K–12 public school students to demonstrate how media construct gender roles.

ADVERTISING AND CONSUMERISM

Since commercial media are for-profit businesses and advertising is their motor, we spend an entire class looking at advertising, marketing, and public relations. This session directly addresses conceptual understanding #5 (Production/Institutions) as we discuss media ownership, corporate mergers, government deregulation, merchandising, branding, and the latest marketing strategies for reaching eyeballs and collecting consumer data. Students analyze consumerism as a dominant ideology and read about how the rise of public relations has affected the decline of journalism (Sullivan, 2011). A consumerist society is an unsustainable model for a finite planet and with the increasing impact of climate change, we embrace the need for educators to address environmental justice with their students. In an attempt to meet this need, we are developing critical media literacy lessons that question humans' relationships with nature and the role of media in shaping these relationships in the

past, present, and future (Beach, Share, & Webb, in press; López, 2014).

To dissect an example of advertising that most students are likely to see, we pass out a palm-sized liquid yogurt smoothie to each student and have them answer the six critical media literacy questions about the product they are holding. After they have shared their ideas, they peel off the shrink-wrap packaging/advertising and expose the sterile white plastic bottle. Students reassess the product they hold in their hands based on this generic-looking bottle that no longer contains the colorful illustrations that previously made it seem more interesting.

With identical white plastic containers, students work in teams to transform their bottle back into a sellable product for various target audiences. Teams are given a list of different demographic groups from which to choose in order to create an advertisement to sell the same white bottle to their target audience. Students use markers and large sheets of chart paper to design their ad with any elements they want to use, from logos and mascots to full-blown jingles and role-playing. The activity provides an opportunity for students to rethink product packaging and create niche advertising that uses the codes and conventions of marketing and popular culture (conceptual understanding #2: Languages/Semiotics). It also encourages students to reflect on the ways people are target marketed to based on assumptions about their age, race, gender, class, and other identities (conceptual understanding #3: Audience/Positionality).

CREATING CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY LESSONS

It is often around this time that student teams begin sharing their own critical media literacy lessons with the class. Every week from this point on, different groups of students present an abbreviated demonstration of the lesson or unit that they have designed to teach to their students. These lessons integrate the academic content they are required to teach with critical media literacy concepts and pedagogy. After each lesson is presented, the students in the audience provide feedback and ask questions. These lesson plan presentations have become a favorite part of the class for students and instructors, as many teams have developed creative new lessons for teaching critical media literacy in various subject areas, from primary language arts and social studies to secondary math and science. Examples of lessons that have been shown in class include the following:

- Elementary school teachers developed a language arts lesson comparing and contrasting different versions of fables and fairy tales with a Venn diagram. Students then work collaboratively to create comic strips with alternative perspectives of the same story. Along the same line, another team had students create movie trailers advertising a book from different perspectives other than the narrator's or main characters' point of view.
- Elementary social studies teachers created a lesson for students to research California missions (4th grade) or national landmarks (5th grade) and then create fictitious webpages, with templates to look like Yelp or TripAdvisor, providing information about the location with multiple perspectives explaining the history of what happened to different groups (Native Americans, colonists, immigrants, African Americans), posting their comments as if they were reviewing the location. Some groups have had their students use templates that look like Facebook or even cell phone screens to retell and repurpose texts.
- Secondary science teachers created a series of lessons to help students distinguish between science fact and fiction in popular culture. Students explore how TV shows and movies often stretch the truth about science by focusing on one particular scientific inaccuracy; then they create a visual representation (movie poster, blog review,

comic strip, etc.) of their analysis and reasoning about the scientific fallacy.

- Secondary math teachers designed a unit of lessons for students to analyze how graphs and infographics can distort information by challenging the way news media and advertising present data visually. Some examples of graphs they shared include bar graphs on housing prices zoomed in on maximum home values instead of including all housing costs, line graphs with an altered *y*-axis scale to distort the visual relationship between *x* and *y* values, and two-dimensional versus three-dimensional graphs that change the viewing angle and size of actual data. After analyzing the examples, students work in teams to create their own distorted graphs intended to skew information and mislead their audience.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PARTNERING PEDAGOGY

In the critical media literacy class, student teachers explore social media and some of the online applications that could be useful for their students. We demonstrate social bookmarking and discuss the process of searching and tagging information; two sides of the same coin. The better students become at categorizing and labeling their data, the more skilled they will be at finding the information they want, since the same process involved in selecting file names and tags is necessary for choosing key words for searching. We engage with guest speaker Sofiya Umoja Noble (2013) about her work critically examining the biases of search engines to help students understand that even the medium through which information passes influences the messages and the audience. We explore hoax websites as a way to challenge students' abilities to evaluate information. The Hoax Museum blog has a large collection (http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/), providing numerous examples to encourage students to triangulate their evidence and evaluate information from multiple sources. We also focus on California Teaching Commission compliance issues, including computer literacy, copyright, online safety, netiquette, and acceptable/responsible use policies. Accompanying these issues, we discuss fair use, remixing, open source, net neutrality, creative commons and the copyleft movement (Ferguson, n.d.; Hobbs, 2010; Ludwig, 2014; National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). There is considerable misinformation among educators about the restrictions of copyright, and this tends to lead teachers to veer away from using media and popular culture in the classroom. It is important that teachers and students understand how *fair use* provides significant latitude to use copyrighted material in the classroom and in their media production, especially when the use is *transformative*. Fair use helps teachers see the connections between their legal rights and their classroom teaching. It is also important for educators to understand the changing rules and regulations that are being fought in the courts regarding net neutrality and open access to the Internet.

Working with the education librarian at UCLA, we have created a website accessible to the public (http://guides.library.ucla.edu/educ466) that hosts numerous links to articles and resources for anyone interested in teaching critical media literacy. During the course, we review many of these resources that offer free apps for creating word clouds, thinking maps, cartoons, animations, gifs, memes, infographics, maps, digital stories, presentations, tutorials, rubrics, and more. Students also share their knowledge about online resources; since online apps change so often, there are usually students who can demonstrate new tools they have discovered.

Digital reading and writing require many of the same skills as print-based literacy, yet when reading and writing are digital and networked, important dimensions change. Digital texts gain new potential to be *multimodal* (combining different formats), *hyperlinked* (connecting with other media and building new relationships), and *interactive* (allowing

for sharing, remixing, and participation) (Beach, 2009). We discuss the unique qualities of mediated environments and networked publics, especially the notions of persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability (boyd, 2014, p. 11).

Most students bring a mixture of prior knowledge, skills, and attitudes about technology, media, and especially video games. In an attempt to encourage an atmosphere of nonjudgmental critique, we examine James Gee's (2007) ideas about lessons that educators can learn from video games, such as the need to take risks, lower the consequences of failure and provide immediate and nonjudgmental feedback. Even long-time gamers are often caught off guard by Gee's positive perspective on the lessons we can learn from gaming.

Marc Prensky (2010), suggests that "the key change and challenge for all 21st century teachers is to become comfortable not with the details of new technology, but rather with a different and better kind of pedagogy: partnering" (p. 3). Prensky (2010) calls for inquiry-based learning and a change in the conventional roles that students and teachers have played; now the teacher should be less of the expert calling the shots and more the facilitator, guide, or coach while students become active researchers and "world changers" (p. 20). This partnering pedagogy follows the traditions of Socrates' dialectical approach of thoughtful questioning, John Dewey's ideas of hands-on experiential learning, and Paulo Freire's call to replace banking education with problem-posing pedagogy. Prensky (2010) asserts that real learning "involves students immediately using what they learn to do something and/or change something in the world. It is crucial that students be made aware that using what they learn to effect positive change in the world, large or small, is one of their important roles in school" (p. 20). He explains that digital technology provides useful tools to do this:

> Even elementary school students can change the world through online writing, supporting and publicizing online causes, making informational and public service videos and machinima, and creating original campaigns of their own design. Anything students create that "goes viral" on the Web reaches millions of people, and students should be continually striving to make this happen, with output that both does good and supports their learning. (Prensky, 2010, p. 66)

This type of social justice education with real-world digital projects is vital because there are tremendous problems in the world and students need to learn that they can be part of the solution. New technologies are reshaping our environment and social relations, providing more opportunities for students to create media that can challenge problems, promote social justice, and enhance academics.

LIGHTS, SOUND, AND MULTIMEDIA ACTION

For the final sessions, we guide students to experiment with media production by devoting separate classes to taking photographs (visual literacy), recording podcasts (aural literacy), and creating digital stories (multimedia literacy) that combine elements of visual and aural literacy. While these production skills could be taught as purely technical, we use the same sociocultural perspective and critical media literacy pedagogy to challenge dominant ideologies that we discuss throughout the course.

Is Seeing Believing?

During the photography session, we explore many concepts of visual literacy as well as experiment with cameras so they can become pedagogical tools for the classroom. We engage with photographic theory and practical applications as we have students collaboratively create a list of photographic techniques by analyzing different magazine covers of the same person (Share, 2015). For the photography assignments, teams of students use the list of photographic techniques that they just generated to illustrate select vocabulary words with their

cell phone cameras. When they return with their photographs, students try to guess each other's words. Then they leave again to create the *good photo/bad photo* assignment, in which they photograph the same person twice, to make them look good in one photo and bad in the other. After the police killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed African American teen in Ferguson, Missouri, hundreds of African Americans used Twitter to pose the question: if they gunned me down, which picture would the media choose? Using the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, they tweeted pairs of pictures of themselves, usually one in which they looked more "socially acceptable" by mainstream media standards and another in which they looked less "respectable" to the dominant media gaze (Vega, 2014). This is a powerful example of how the *good photo/bad photo* assignment can have serious political implications as we see a new generation combining photography and social media to protest and challenge hegemony.

Sounds Speak Volumes

Using our ears and mouth more than our eyes, we analyze the engineering of sound in media. Starting with a single phoneme, we practice pronouncing the letter O with different intonations to convey various meanings. Then we combine letters to spell the word *bad* and practice saying it differently to convey opposite meanings, from "not good" to "fabulous!" Next, we put words together and read the same sentence several times with different punctuation each time. The idea behind this activity is to explore incrementally the way sounds, words, and even sentences can convey different meanings, depending on the context in which they are voiced and heard. These are the codes and conventions of dialogue and narration in media (conceptual understanding #2: Languages/Semiotics) that shape what and how we hear people speaking, rapping, and singing. They are important production skills students should learn for public speaking and creating different types of audio recordings. These lessons are also useful for children learning to read and for English language learners, as they explore the ways some words in English change meaning simply by their pronunciation.

From words to sounds and music, we move into tone painting and investigate the ways musical sounds conjure up ideas, feelings, and images. After listening to short clips of famous musical scores, we discuss the role that music plays to tell stories, create atmosphere, and sometimes perpetuate stereotypes. These align with the visual and performing arts content standards for California public schools in all the categories: artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural context, aesthetic valuing, and connections, relationships, and applications. Some of the elements of music we consider are duration, dynamics, pitch, silence, tempo, texture, timbre, and rhythm.

Another important category of aural literacy is the use of sound effects. Very few video games, television shows, cartoons, or movies are created without a Foley artist adding sound effects. This is a common, yet invisible element in most multimedia productions. It is also an activity that is highly motivating when students create their own sound effects while reading books or making movies. During this class, we bring in household items for students to experiment with, making sounds and listening to the feelings and images they evoke. In teams, students create podcasts with their cell phones in which they retell a nursery rhyme or discuss a topic in a specific radio genre, using all the elements of aural literacy that were just covered. Elementary school preservice teachers have created podcasts of "The Muffin Man" as a rap song, "Itsy Bitsy Spider" as breaking news, "Jack and Jill" as a sporting event broadcast, and "Rub-a-Dub-Dub" as a call-in talk show. Math and science high school preservice teachers produced podcasts of a commercial to buy and sell gravity, a call-in talk show about combining like terms, a rap song about dark matter, a news program about imaginary numbers, and an annual mathematics award show with guest stars Mr. Parenthe-

sis, Dr. Exponent, Multiplication, Division, Addition, and Subtraction.

Engaging Eyes and Ears

During the next class, we combine aural skills with visual literacy for students to create digital stories. There are numerous tools for making digital stories, but since most of our students teach in underresourced inner-city schools, we teach them how to create a digital story with the most common computer program they are likely to find, Microsoft Office's PowerPoint. Many people are not aware that PowerPoint contains the option to record narration, something that can easily provide the sound track for a digital story. This is by no means the best program to use for making digital stories, but it is the most likely tool they will have access to and one of the programs they and their K–12 students are probably already somewhat familiar with using. Finding a tool that is accessible is important, but the tool is just a means for the most important work of learning how to tell a story.

Indigenous pedagogy provides examples of the power of oral storytelling, the use of metaphor to convey ideas beyond the literal meanings of words, the social value of interviewing elders and people whose voices are often marginalized or ignored, and the benefit of turning information into a narrative; something moviemakers and politicians understand all too well (Arrows, 2013). For tens of thousands of years, people around the world have been passing along their values and entire cultural identities through oral traditions. Then, about 500 years ago, following the invention of the printing press, in many parts of the world print literacy flourished as oral storytelling disappeared. "Thus, the richness of oral communication was lost, which includes, from all points of view, a significant dimension of musicality, proxemics, gestural communication, spatial relationship, specific closeness and sensorial perception between those speaking" explain Tornero and Varis (2010, p. 106). Fortunately, many indigenous societies have continued to practice and preserve the tradition of oral storytelling, a distinctly human social practice that remains a powerful space for teaching and learning. In his book, *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education*, Four Arrows (2013) explains how many aspects of indigenous pedagogy can benefit educators and students, such as oral storytelling that aligns better with audiovisual media than it does with print-based literacy. Information communication technologies have opened up new opportunities for digital storytelling to revitalize oral traditions and empower youth to tell their own stories and create alternative media. When students learn to make their own multimedia productions, they gain the power to appropriate the tools of mainstream media that can challenge dominant narratives created by corporations more often concerned with profit than with social justice.

We teach the basic elements of digital storytelling, show examples, and have students storyboard their ideas for creating a counterhegemonic digital story (Ohler, 2008). In order to provide an easy and quick example that our teachers can take right into their classrooms, we have them use six index cards on which to draw the key scenes of their story. Students work in teams, distributing the tasks for drawing the illustrations, writing the script, recording the sound, and assembling all the elements in PowerPoint. Each digital story is first storyboarded and written as a script. The scenes are drawn horizontally on index cards that are then photographed, and the images are uploaded into a PowerPoint presentation. Finally, the group records their narration, dialogue, and sound effects. By creating their digital stories together in class, students are able to practice with each other the process that they can later use with their students.

CHALLENGES FOR CREATING SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATORS

Most students find the use of media and popular culture to be excellent tools for discussing deep feelings and systemic structures of

oppression, and yet some students are not ready or interested in delving into issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, and the systems and privileges that perpetuate them. Laura Ixta, a preservice elementary school teacher, writes in her final course reflection that she was exposed to many new ideas, "and although sometimes I did get uncomfortable with the material presented, it is something that allowed me to explore why it made me uncomfortable. It allowed for self-reflection, and more learning about my own upbringing, my own experiences, and my own identity" (Ixta, 2014). These topics might not be necessary to implement the CCSS, but they are necessary if one is to be a social justice educator and work for transformative pedagogy. Critical media literacy aims to empower teachers and students with a sense of civic responsibility to confront social problems with progressive solutions, often involving media and technology. Our goal is to prepare teachers to be able to use technology and media to improve their teaching, as well as support social justice educators with ideas and strategies to inspire their students to action. High school science teacher John Choi (2013) writes in his final reflection for Ed466 about his experience bringing critical media literacy into his advisory class:

> In an organic manner, certain students had shifted from asking questions and examining media to seeking action. Questions of "what values are represented in the message" made way for questions that asked how we could change this problem. What I found was that social justice came from them and not my own urging; once they understood the injustice, students found themselves wanting to enact change. This powerful model of praxis, in which students took critical media literacy theory and called forth action, showed a pedagogy that had not been present in my advisory class before.

Choi's reflection is a powerful example of social justice education; however, not all of the projects that students complete articulate such a critical perspective. While some of these experiences may lack the critical analysis that we aim for, we recognize that learning is a process involving different paths for different people; sometimes we are planting seeds and sometimes just opening doors. Critical media literacy pedagogy is intended to encourage students to explore popular culture, media, and technology through asking the questions that hopefully will guide them to more critical understandings of their world. Giroux (1987) writes, "It is important to stress that a critical pedagogy of literacy and voice must be attentive to the contradictory nature of student experience and voice and therefore establish the grounds whereby such experience can be interrogated and analyzed with respect to both their strengths and weaknesses" (p. 20). Democratic pedagogy requires nonjudgmental dialectical struggle to question possible implications and consequences of all ideas and actions. The notion of a pedagogy that builds on theory and real-world experiences of students is a crucial component for thinking about how to incorporate critical media literacy into any content area or grade level (Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & López, 2013). Twenty-first century critical media literacy pedagogy integrates discussions of media representation, power, and ideology into a class instead of teaching this content as something separate. This is neither merely educational technology nor just a collection of lesson plans; it is a pedagogy that should serve as a critical framework to guide teachers and students to question all information, tools, and ideas. Reflecting on the course, elementary preservice teacher, Julia Hiser (2012) explains that critical media literacy pedagogy:

> gives us, as teachers, a framework and a tool kit. We are equipped with the means to teach meaningful and relevant literacy, to foster critical awareness, to empower through production, and all in a way in which form matches content, in which the methodology of teaching mirrors the ideals of what is being taught.

CONCLUSION

Teacher education programs, like most K–12 public education in the United States, are under considerable fire these days from people wanting to privatize all things public and from a "reform movement" that is looking for greater accountability to empirically prove effectiveness based on standardized high-stakes test scores. Flores-Koulish (2006) asserts, "The longer U.S. public education's 'accountability movement' continues, the less our teachers have opportunities to engage students deeply in creative, original thought" (p. 239). Accompanying this drive for positivist notions of accountability and standardization are the Common Core State Standards that, on one hand, limit and homogenize what is to be taught, while on the other hand, open the door for an expanded understanding of literacy, the integration of more technological tools and media, and the empowerment of "students as critical thinkers through media production and analysis" (Moore & Bonilla, 2014, p. 7). In an educator's guide about the CCSS and media literacy published by the National Association for Media Literacy Education, Moore and Bonilla argue that "media literacy education … supports many of the most challenging goals of the Common Core State Standards" (p. 1). Schwarz (2001) and Flores-Koulish (2006) support the teaching of media literacy in teacher education because of the benefits it offers to preservice teachers and their future students. Teachers act as role models, and the more media literate the teacher, the more likely the students will see an adult model critical thinking when it comes to discussions about popular culture, media, and technology. Goetze et al. (2005) explain the main reason for teaching media literacy in teacher education programs is that "teachers cannot teach what they have not learned, and learned to value, themselves" (2005, p. 161). In her final reflection about Ed466, elementary preservice teacher, Casey Anderson (2012) writes:

> As I look back over this quarter in Critical Media Literacy class, I feel like I have learned so much and have many ideas for lessons to take with me into my classroom. Most importantly, I know I want to teach my students to be more than consumers of technology and media, I want them to become producers who question and challenge mainstream ideas that have become norms. Creating a community of learners who think critically about messages they receive will be of great importance in my classroom. As a teacher, it is my imperative to create a space for communication, student empowerment and solidarity.

NOTE

1. Throughout this essay I often write in third person because many people helped develop ideas instrumental in the design and implementation of the Critical Media Literacy course at UCLA. The following people have taught the course and because of their invaluable contributions, I write with them in mind: Shani Byard, Peter Carlson, Steven Funk, Antero Garcia, Mark Gomez, Clifford Lee, Eduardo Lopez, Elexia Reyes-McGovern, and Martin Romero.

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