Democratic Education, Experiential Education and Exploring the Agency of Students: Educational Principles, Practices, and Philosophies in the Promotion and Achievement of Active and Engaged Students

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Media Education History, Currency, and Future in British Columbia: A Review and Analysis of the Foundations, Relevance, and Scope of Media Education for the Digital Age

by

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Abstract

Essay one: This extended essay draws on theories mainly from John Dewey and Paulo Friere to show how their philosophies are valuable to education, and in particular media education. The prominence and similarities between the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire merit consideration and analysis as both thinkers offer significant contribution to the modern conception of non-traditional education. Both thinkers felt the roles of experience and democracy were essential as both must exist for liberation-based development to occur and democratic education to be made possible. Understanding Dewey and Freire is critical as they draw attention to both pedagogy and content, particularly with how they relate to the democratic ideal. As media literacy has become essential in the education of young students, the research presented in this essay helps devise a framework for a media literacy curriculum influenced by the thinking of Dewey and Freire.

Essay two: This extended essay discusses the history of media education in British Columbia by shedding light on key developments and by mentioning the obstacles encountered in the advancement of media education. Two university level educators, and an advocacy group member from a non-profit organization are interviewed to investigate the relevance of media education and the direction in which it is headed. The primary research found that basic media education should start at the elementary level in students' lives, and should continue at the secondary level to assist in the positive development of students. Discussion of pornography in the classroom, and more broadly, visual media literacy as part of a diverse society, were deemed important by interviewees and research findings for consideration as future media education topics. The research revealed in the essay found that youth should have safe environments where they can discuss pornography, and visual media literacy should also be promoted for social justice as part of a diverse society.

Keywords: Democratic Education; Experiential Education; Media Education; Digital Age

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Introduction

In the range and evolution of educational philosophy, the prominence and similarities between the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire merit consideration and analysis. Their philosophical work offers significant contribution to the modern conception of non-traditional education. Whether it is Freire's notion of "becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1970, p. 57), or Dewey's idea "to form the citizen, not the man" (Dewey, 1916, p. 72), both thinkers felt the roles of experience and democracy were essential as both must exist for liberation-based development to occur and democratic education to be made possible. Understanding Dewey and Freire is critical as they draw attention to both pedagogy and content, particularly with how they relate to the democratic ideal. As the work of Dewey and Freire remains quite comparable and complementary, and as media literacy has become essential in the education of young students, we can begin to devise a framework for a media literacy curriculum influenced by their thinking.

Theme of Democracy in Education

Democratic values, principles and practices were main themes in the thinking of both Dewey and Freire. They identified issues of class disparity, power and privilege as obstacles to a democratic education. Both theorists claimed education must constantly confront the disruptive and dividing impact of class membership, religious groups, and racial and cultural pluralism. The desire for engaged, critical citizenship was a commonality between Dewey and Freire, and they stressed the acquisition of critical

citizenship by focusing on systems of education that are informed, democratic, and culturally sensitive.

Dewey believed democracy should be the foundation and main objective of education. The capability of a society to effectively educate its people would essentially require the society to be democratic. Dewey suggests that democracy is not just a matter of mutual interest, but a chance to foster everyone's distinctive capabilities. He felt education must not be a privileged opportunity, but a societal necessity for everyone. Freire (1970) also felt that hope stems from peoples' incompletion, from which they go in continuous search and can only be fulfilled in communion with other individuals. The success of democracy is not just education, but this success also relates to the citizen's ability to engage in dialogue and to uphold mutuality and communal need. Dewey believed democracy is more expansively explained as a means of related living made up of people who are communally engaged, aware and concerned to the extent that the acts of others give aim and guidance to individual behaviour. Thus, democracy, comes from not only dialogue, but also equality. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) states that democracy "is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity" (p. 67). Freire (1970) echoes this perspective when he argues that "dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (p. 88-89). A real humanist, in Freire's eyes, is largely characterized by trust in individuals. Having this trust is better than any number of actions taken to favour them otherwise. In Dewey's view, those who govern and those who are governed must share perspective, values and trust. Those who govern need to earn the trust of the citizenry and must be driven by the

concerns and demands of citizens. In both points of view, Freire and Dewey felt citizens must be motivated by concern for other citizens and by an understanding of action as constitutive of the social world.

Dewey's understanding of democracy relates much to what is discussed in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. By Dewey's description, democracy can be conceived as an encompassing method of life and a dominating ideal of social relations. Democracy is built in human nature, and can be applied to every society. So democracy is a continual experiment in which there is always the possibility of enrichment. This kind of thinking resonates with Freire's belief that the "world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (Freire, 1970, p. 50). Freire suggests what Dewey conceived of as success in his contention that we should live in a society that includes a separate, considerably democratic, means of dealing with conflict in its battle for the constant and more pressing need for overcoming injustice. The result of this kind of democratic act could be new, emerging cultures of freedom that are defiant to oppression and capable of creating ways of empowerment for everyone. Both Dewey and Freire stressed the necessity of interaction between individuals as a foundation for action and growth. Without this interaction, the societies would likely maintain oppressiveness, and be concerned less with communal development than individual self interest, which weakens the foundations of community.

The Role of Experience

Freire and Dewey stressed that the role of experience is imperative in the principles and practices of pedagogy. Dewey believed experience arises from the

outcome of two major principles. One of them is continuity, or the idea that experience is going to have a lasting impact on a student's future. The other principle is interaction, in relation to social action. A person's present experience can be understood to consist of the interaction between an individual's past experiences with the requirements of the present situation. In essence, experience does not have a predetermined value in any way, or is invaluable on its own. However, the value can be assessed in terms of the degree to which that person makes a contribution to the society's democratic ideal. Consequently, the experience afforded a person has a lasting influence and would continue to impact that person's role or the person's input to their society. According to Abdi (2001), Dewey thought curricular experiences are not simply intellectual drills, and educational institutions are not simply venues in which they are to take place, but are themselves feasible communities inside of which critical awareness, social duty, and democratic ideals and activity are to be practiced.

Freire regarded the role of experience in a similar way. He believed that reading "does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 29). A person is not just a product of a school's education then, but of the world in which that person starts learning. It could be argued that the world tends to have even more impact than the word. According to Freire and Macedo (1987), "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 29). If there is no relation to the world, there can be no real acts of understanding. Therefore, the word and the world must be inextricably related in practices and processes of learning.

For both Dewey and Freire, experience in education is not a process that would just occur without informed teaching practices. Both stress the need to explore the basis of pedagogical knowledge, and to do this in relation to practical application. The ultimate impact is on transforming the world and advancing democratic society. Students must re-think their relationship to knowledge, and realize the political and social power of knowledge. They do this by linking the knowledge they already have from prior experience, in order to make it impactful on society. What Freire thinks of as an act of knowing, and what Dewey conceives of as warranted assertions, are a result of a transformed relation to knowledge that demands initiating the learning process with pre-existing political, academic, and experiential knowledge. As this happens, as Allman and Wallis (1997) assert, it is the start of the struggle to foster an understanding of reality that is deeper and more critical.

The role of experience generated by traditional schooling can be threatened by the persistence of the traditional teacher-student relationship. Dewey (1916) argues that this traditional relationship is an imposition, as the instructor teaches and the student absorbs. Dewey warns that education is not a case of talking and being told, but instead, it is an active as well as a constructive procedure needing involvement from both the teacher and student. In his critique of teaching, Dewey cautions that a resistance to learn can occur after the instructor fails to consider the curiosity of his or her students and does not encourage an environment with interaction. According to Dewey (1916), this kind of pedagogy is relatable to inscribing records, with the student returning only what has been inscribed when the right button is pressed. Dewey would rather have a fostering of an active development process. Development is much more helpful to the achievement of

education, and is described by Dewey (1916) as experience re-constructed and re-organized. This description expands what experience means, and increases the capacity to guide the cause of subsequent experience. Dewey was particularly critical of the view that only the content of textbooks would be enough to-further the development of every child.

Similarly, Freire (1970) discussed what he considered the "banking concept" of education, in which students are "not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher" (p. 80). Such pedagogy reduces the student to the position of containers or receptacles, which are filled by the instructor. Freire (1970) notices the better students in the traditional system are the ones who more passively allow themselves to be filled. Education of this kind does not permit true learning in which the students are called upon to co-create knowledge, or actively create knowledge, which is attainable through dialogue. Instead, education is about memorization of the contents told by the teacher for future regurgitation.

The curriculum itself needs to be transformed as later discussed in this paper. Also, the teacher-student relationship needs to change to a more equitable and productive arrangement. It should not be a case, however, in which teachers relinquish or suppress their authority and knowledge. Reflecting on the work of Freire and Dewey, Allman and Wallis (1997) state that instructors could act as navigators and purveyors of direction, but they must also completely respect and think about the authority that students bring to the educational encounter. Democratic education should include interaction as a constant aspect. The teacher as the powerful authority, and the student as the powerless and

ignorant should no longer exist. To put it in perspective, the teacher must not work from an authoritative position, but work more as a guide in an assistive position. For Dewey, the teacher must always be a friendly partner and guide working toward common goals. In a similar vein, Freire thought that the student "needs the teacher's help, as in any pedagogical situation, but this does not mean that the teacher's help nullifies the student's creativity and responsibility for constructing his or her own written language and for reading this language" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 35). In addition, Freire believed that learning is insistent on a pedagogy that includes asking questions, and that this teaching must be democratic and for this reason opposed to authoritarianism.

Both Dewey and Freire, argued that teachers should engage the students in the framework of their own outlook and experience. Teachers should also foster that perception without hesitation until it submits to a new outlook to be encouraged further. Dewey thought that subject matter should be shown, as for a child, in its human context and setting, and that only experience which has human value and function is solid and usable. Freire emphasized that the knack of reading and writing is attained in an educative process starting with words and themes that are significant and important to the common experience (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 42). Expanding on the role of individuals in society, Freire (1970) states, "people develop their own power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83).

Freirian Pedagogy: Theories Applicable to Media Education

Paulo Freire's pedagogy provides much of the theoretical and practical foundations needed to inform good digital literacy programs aimed at promoting social change. The challenge for digital literacy initiatives is to participate in a critical engagement with Freire's work, adapting Freire's critical insights to the project of social change through media education. It was Freire himself who proposed the idea that such adaptation is necessary; that is, Freire argued that his ideas must not be blindly followed, but rather reinvented. Freire's pedagogy leads us into a transformative kind of education that is particularly relevant to digital literacy.

Freire felt that education is always political, never neutral. In Freire's view, there is a struggle in education between forces of reproduction and drivers of transformation; that is, education operates as a tool which is utilized to serve the interests of dominant social groups and re-install structures of domination, or supports the interests of the oppressed to become the work of freedom and social change. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1972) disapproved of the 'banking concept' of education, in which knowledge is a "gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 46). In such a system, the teacher assumes the role of depositor and students become the depositories. The teacher simply talks and students listen. The teacher also selects the program content without consulting the students, and the students comply. Freire (1972) criticizes the banking concept of education, which turns students into containers or "receptacles to be filled by the teacher" (p. 45). He contends that this kind of education dulls students' curiosity, weakens their ability to develop critical awareness and forces them to merge with the world as it is.

Students also merge with the fragmented perception of reality deposited in that world (Freire and Faundez, 1989), so students are limited in their thinking by those views. Consequently, within a banking concept of education framework, students are not pushed to foster their rational, innovative or imaginative abilities. There are structures of domination reproduced by immersing learners into the logic of the current system and by generating conformity to it.

According to Freire (1972), everyone is capable of looking critically at their world in a dialogical encounter with others. Freire (1972), states that educators "must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of men in their relations with the world' (p. 52). Through the pedagogical strategy of posing problems, students learn to question answers instead of simply trying to answer questions. This form of teaching enables students to experience education as something they do, not as something done to them (Shor, 1993). Freire believed that the emergence of critical consciousness makes possible people's reflexive intervention in the historical process (Spaaij and Jeanes, 2013). Problem-posing education assists students to develop a critical understanding of the broader contexts of power in the world that form students' life conditions and to realize that they have the capability, through praxis or practice, to change these conditions. Consequently, they see the world, according to Freire (1972), "not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation' (p. 56). In other words, Freirean pedagogy informs students that people live within culturally created contexts that are changed by consciously directed steps.

The Need for Transformative Education

The grounds for transformative education are established with an active, dialogical and critical education that is to be co-created with learners, not just for them. According to Freire (1973), dialogue is a connection between people that is encouraged by love, humility, hope and trust. It is through dialogue that students are transformed into subjects from objects. Teachers can learn, and students are able to share information or teach. Freire (1972) insisted that the educator and the students learn from each other in dialogue, and transition into being jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. As both search for knowledge, the educator and the students have "mutual intentions, which make study collectively owned, not the teacher's sole property" (Shor, 1993, p. 26). Bringing about dialogue is not a matter of mere ways and means. Instead, it is a different connection to knowledge and society that involves the teacher and students. Freire and Shor argued:

> [D]ialogue must be understood as something taking part in the very historical nature of human beings … Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it … Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can then act critically to transform reality. (Freire and Shor, 1987, p. 98 - 99)

Freirian pedagogy gives us insight on where dialogical, problem-posing education should begin. It concerns itself with the relationship between knowledge and a person's material existence. The present, existential, concrete situations, showing the desires of the people is the starting point for Freirian pedagogy, which gives the chance to explore generative

themes from everyday life and to trigger people's consciousness with respect to those themes. The curriculum gets created around the themes and state of people's lives, allowing students to think about the lives they have and to ponder and discover their meaning and value. As dialogical reflection occurs with peers, they acquire some critical distance and think about how to change things. Group knowledge emerges from this kind of exercise, which also brings to light the collective dimensions of learning in education, and the call for social change.

Freire conceived of education as an ongoing, and continuous process in which students go through various stages of educational progress. According to Freire (1973), the first stage is “naive transitivity”, which is described by a lack of insight into the manner in which people's social conditions weaken their well-being. The last stage is that of “critically transitive consciousness”, which involves a critical look into the meaning of problems, profound inquisitiveness, and the rejection of passive positions (Freire, 1973). As a critically transitive thinker, one is “empowered to critically reflect on the conditions that shape his or her life, and to work collectively to change these conditions on the basis of such critical insight” (Campbell and MacPhail, 2002, p. 334). On the other hand, there are many obstacles encountered on the road to critical transitivity. Freire (1973) states that the oppressed are immersed in a “culture of silence” and “democratic inexperience” as they have internalized domineering structures and stay passive. This is a result of exposure to several years of being in banking education. It produces feelings of alienation, fatalism, cynicism and a resistance to dialogical education. The aim of Freirian education is to de-socialize students from passive behavior in an educational setting, where students are not thinking for themselves and simply receiving instructions

and being told what things mean. There is also the de-socialization of educators, transitioning them into problem-posers and dialogue-leaders rather than oppressive narrators. On the other hand, Freire realizes that in such difficult situations, tact and prudence are needed when taking part in a dialogical approach, and that dialogue might need to be introduced in a gradual way.

Transitioning into a Beneficial Pedagogy for a Better Society

Both Dewey and Freire criticized the conventions of traditional schooling, in which there isn't value of a person's life experience or the integration of that experience with curricular or pedagogical experiences. A basic fault in the traditionalist method to schooling identified by both thinkers is the teaching method's incessant and ever-present dualistic nature. A non-dualistic, democratic and progressive education system is beneficial to society because its objective relies on a field of learning and experience that is not to be labeled, static, or subtractive. Instead that field is additive, adjustable, and developmental or progressive. Dewey and Freire saw the dualistic leanings of traditional schooling as a considerable flaw. The notion of viewing students as bright or dull, according to Dewey, or literate or illiterate as mentioned by Freire, refutes the existence of a development or learning process. This leads to forgoing the course of becoming literate or becoming knowledgeable by simply being one or the other without fail.

Dewey and Freire offer some educational options as an alternative to traditional schooling as they believe democratic education is the right framework within which to educate. The two thinkers mention the idea of development as the basis to real and valid education. Dewey (1916) mentions development as an ideal which is completion or

achievement of perfection, and not as a growing process which is simply an unfolding condition towards this goal.

In essence traditional schooling, tries to work from a very dominant standpoint. It views many things as black and white, such as filler in contrast to container, knower in contrast to the ignorant, and right in contrast to wrong. Dewey claimed that such schooling falls short of considering a person's capacities and needs, which are diverse, and lead to the domination of the teacher over the student. In Freire's view, the dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed is sustained if education is not democratic. Abdi (2001) maintains that for many critical theorists including Freire, education is "an ever present and powerful political instrument that can either affirm or deny the needs of the community, thus engendering the move toward emancipatory self-perceptions or the "permanentizing" of the status quo" (p. 193).

The main premise behind the legitimacy of democratic education and experience is the consideration of a person's levels of awareness and experience, and integrating this kind of variety into the learning practice. The challenge, according to Dewey, is to find out what tendencies are searching for expression at a point in time and exactly what materials and approaches will work to rouse and guide a genuinely educative development. In other words, educators should use effective strategies to anticipate and stimulate the students' desire to express themselves. On the subject of a person's levels of awareness and experience, Freire stated that an individual "has to respect the levels of understanding that those becoming educated have of their own reality" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 41).

The aim of education in time, according to Dewey and Freire, is to establish and maintain a society predicated on a genuinely democratic ideal where there is no separation of power. Instead, everyone has power in terms of knowledge access, and everyone is concerned about each other's well being as evident through their actions. The central objective is to ensure everyone has the right to complete development. A society worth serving only if it is comprised of members that have significant personal qualities is a problematic notion for Dewey. Dewey (1916) responds to this notion by stating:

> The fact is that the opposition of high worth of personality to social efficiency is a product of a feudally organized society with its rigid division of inferior and superior. The latter are supposed to have time and opportunity to develop themselves as human beings; the former are confined to providing external products. When social efficiency as measured by product or output is urged as an ideal in a would be democratic society, it means that the depreciatory estimate of the masses characteristic of an aristocratic community is accepted and carried over. But if democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all. (p. 95)

Freire's idea of becoming more fully human, and his concept of liberation resonate with Dewey's perspective. Freire believes everyone has the right to become fully human, whether it is the oppressor or oppressed. It can only be achieved, however, by fully eradicating oppression.

There are many similarities in what Dewey and Freire consider a progressive society. Dewey thinks of progressive society as dependent on individual variations as a

way of developing itself. According to Dewey (1916), a progressive society regards individual variations as valuable qualities that signify growth. A truly democratic society permits intellectual freedom and encouragement of diverse abilities and interests in the the educational system. Freire also thinks a person can not create or re-create knowledge without the existence of individual variations that Dewey speaks of, and the individual variations are the key to growth. Dewey and Freire, suggest a society that not only encourages growth, but also considers the growth to be essential for progression and successful education.

Freire and Dewey argue forcefully and practically that change and progression in society is achieved by means of continued social action. The change and progression can happen through determined participation by the society's members, and this change and progression cannot simply occur by what we consider to be human nature. The society they hope for has a strong footing in the betterment of the self, one that persists to enable growth, in hopes of generating and maintaining an environment in which each member of the society can achieve his or her complete potential. Those citizens would exist in genuine agreement, peace and equality with each other. This is the kind of society that responds to the issues of justice, and the recovery of a lost humanity. Dewey's and Freire's influential ideas can lead us to think of potential pedagogical approaches that would be appropriate and relevant in today's world. To achieve this goal, we can conceptualize media literacy curricula to ensure that some of the ideas of Dewey and Freire have been integrated, as will be discussed later in this essay.

Relevance of Freire to Digital Literacy

There are compelling concerns with regard to the deleterious impacts of digital technology on the educational process, particularly with an abundance of, and reliance on such technologies in educational contexts. Consequently, a responsibility arises to raise the digital literacy of educators and students. In doing so, it would help us to progress the way Paulo Freire would have liked us to in the digital age. It should be understood that in one sense, students are far more digitally literate than their teachers; but their critical understanding of digital culture and its consequences are not as well honed. It is important explore the connection between Freire's thinking, and the thinking of a more contemporary philosopher and theorist, Pierre Levy, in order to investigate the types of digital literacies that educators and students will require to develop if we are to take advantage of the newer technologies in the more recently acquired knowledge space.

In the areas of communication, regulation, economics, and politics, we find noticeable and ongoing changes. In terms of what we consider tradition, experience, art, science, and language also continues to change. This recent transitory period of change can contribute to tremendous progress. Shifting away from industrial and analogue ways of working and thinking, and adopting more digital methods, we have a chance to progress not just economically, but ethically. It is important to look at these kinds of prospects in terms of human potential and social opportunity. Teachers must do their part in the ongoing emergence of expansive digital environments where people can contribute to a collective intelligence. Thus, a complete course is made in achieving the joint enrichment of individuals.

Developing digital literacy is critical in helping young students navigate through the technological environment they are in. Educators must "become digitally literate if they are to succeed in raising students' critical consciousness to a point where those in our charge realize their right to 'name the world' and 'say their own word,' as Paulo Freire puts it" (Poore, 2011, p. 20). Not only does this mean that educators need to be supported in acquiring digital skills, but also must be provided with the philosophical and ethical frameworks for comprehending digital cultures and how they are shaping the intellectual capabilities. Teachers must turn more often to works of philosophy, ethics, or social theory instead of instructional guides to teach better.

Pierre Levy's four 'anthropological spaces' provide an understanding of why digital literacy is so critical to the ethical development and flourishing of students. Levy (1999) discusses the intellectual development of human beings in terms of four anthropological spaces: earth, territory, commodity and knowledge. The spaces are called anthropological, since they are distinctly human and depend on human technologies, significations, language, culture, conventions, representations, and emotions (Levy, 1999). In the digital age, the knowledge space is what we need to mostly be concerned with, since it is still developing and relates to collective imagination, the creation of knowledge and the building of intelligent communities. Levy (1999) describes the knowledge of the other as "inseparable from the construction and habitation of a world" (Levy, 1999, p. 12). Instead of simply thinking of others as an object, we should see others as a source of knowledge, and through this change in attitude we come to know our own self (Levy, 1999). Consequently, the computerization of society, through the knowledge space, has the possibility to encourage "the construction of intelligent

communities in which our social and cognitive potential can be mutually developed and enhanced" (Levy, 1999, p. 17). In light of our understanding of the work of Paulo Freire, it could be argued that it is only by means of true dialogical communication that we can be connected with the world, and not simply in it. Levy presents a Utopian thesis regarding the capacity for human flourishing, which is Freire's general thesis, but through technological means in the digital age.

The work of Levy, as it relates to Freire, is about our capacity to prosper with others and to acknowledge their humanity and ours, as much as it is also about understanding and responding to the human condition. Educators have a responsibility to assist students in becoming conscious of how they are socially formed, how they socially form themselves, and how they socially form others (Poore, 2011). This responsibility is evident in action when educators help students comprehend the social forces that impact humanity, and how educators also take part within those forces and can help in forming them. Educators can think about how they are affecting the human condition, and how they can ultimately intervene to improve it.

Before connecting the dots from the philosophical sense to the practical, it is helpful to look at things from a sociological perspective. A claim that Levy (1999) makes is that wealth is contingent upon the "ability to navigate the knowledge space" (p. 1). We can interpret this and think of literacy as key to wealth, and for Levy, wealth is understood and discussed as the wisdom of individuals. People would then need the means to become digitally literate, so that they can conduct themselves in the digital age with greater care, responsibility, and use technology to their advantage.

If educators are going to play a critical role in helping young students navigate the unfolding knowledge spaces of collective intelligence, as Levy calls them, we need to begin thinking about how to develop expansive, responsive, and consequential programs of digital literacy. This is a better course of action than "advocating a literacy that shows us how to defensively find fault with what some see as the 'pap' that the media so unscrupulously and artfully feed 'the masses' for uncritical consumption, we should, in fact, aim much higher" (Poore, 2011, p. 22). It means it is important to have literacy that educates us on how to be participatory, to create, and consume digital culture (Jenkins, Kelley, Clinton, McWilliams, Pitts-Wiley, and Reilly, 2013). This kind of literacy needs to be strived for, so intellectual wealth and human flourishing can be acquired in the digital domains.

If it can be agreed upon that as a result of the information age, knowledge space is being opened up, and that digital literacy is the key to our successful and fitting navigation of that space, we can think not just philosophically, and sociologically, but also practically. We should examine more closely now the emergence of digital literacy and the digital culture of students.

Following the Emergence of Digital Literacy and the Digital Culture of Students

Australia and England are leaders in media education, and have a longer history in the field than Canada. Thus, research from those countries is discussed here as it has been relevant to the progress of media education around the world. According to Poore (2011), the 2009 Northwest Learning Grid (England) added an important element into the previously held conception of what digital literacy is, particularly, 'knowing how to act

sensibly, safely and appropriately online'" (p. 23). In Australia, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs' (MCEECDYA) report on ICT (Information and Communication Technology) literacy for Years 6 and 10 broadly categorized six main processes related to digital literacy, which included accessing, managing, evaluating information (Poore, 2011). The other processes were creating new understandings, communicating with others, and appropriately using ICT. The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth in 2008, assessed Australian school pupils' digital proficiencies related to the measures mentioned above. According to Poore (2011), "only 57% of Year 6 students and only 66% of Year 10 students met challenging but reasonable expectations in the above six measures (these figures were an increase on the previous study conducted in 2005)" (p. 23). In contrast to traditional literacy measures in Western countries, the figures appear on the low side. Kennedy, Krause, Judd, Churchward, and Gray (2006) analyzed an initial review of student experiences with technology in the first year of studies at the University of Melbourne, and it showed most pupils utilized technologies for their studies primarily for convenience and control. In the United Kingdom, the Joint Information Systems Committee (2008) further revealed that students are not sure about how to "map their current learning experiences with technology onto their studies, and could not see how ICT and learning can work together outside of class" (Poore, 2011), p. 23 – 24). Although it is not the case presently, instead of students seeing ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as a platform for learning, they saw it as simply a platform for administration or content delivery. As far as competencies are concerned, a recent

United States study from ECAR (EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research) revealed that students measure their digital proficiency highly.

Research has revealed some concerning things about students' digital literacy and their online information behavior. According to the Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER, 2008), students are content with the basic means of search. Students can not be perceived as researchers doing a thorough job, since they struggle with assessing information for importance, precision, or authority. Green and Hannon (2007) found that students have always had difficulty in prioritizing and evaluating their search results. However, it is the case, that now students' intellectual behavior is more visible, since it can be tracked and determined using tools that have been developed. It is important to realize that young students are concerned about what they are seeing as the unmanageable scale of the web, and are looking for direction, not essentially on how to use the technology, but on how to think about it (Green and Hannon, 2007). The role of educators becomes critical as they guide students through the knowledge space, which is no longer about access to digital tools, but about access to information, relationships, and networks (Poore, 2011).

If we once again invoke Freire's vision for education, we can pull back from issues of processes, measures and studies, and give some thought to how we can combine philosophy and research. This must be done to create a plan for humanizing the encounter with the knowledge space, since education is more than just literacy processes. As Freire mentions several times in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), education is about increasing students' critical consciousness to a level where they become aware of the role

they play in the way the world is forming and how they can take part in changing it for the better.

Digital Literacy Development

At the operational level, the combining of theory and research into a development for digital literacy needs professional learning for teachers, and in-class utilization of digital technologies. As far as teacher professional learning is concerned, two main stages of digital literacy need to be identified. The first is a functional digital literacy that is concerned with having skills in a technical sense, and the the second is a critical digital literacy that examines how the digital space works in a cultural and intellectual way (Poore, 2011, p. 24). Ways of building educators' skill base in learning how to utilize digital technologies in classrooms are diverse and complex. Embracing new digital technologies has encountered the challenge of changing mindsets and attitudes, as well as dealing with panic or trying to gain confidence. However, fears that has loomed around technology in the past have mostly been overcome as tools become more user friendly. For critical digital literacy, educators can be urged to engage with the literature (humanist philosophy, educational theory, cultural studies, and popular non-fiction works on digital culture) often and more deeply and we should have ways of assisting them in doing that (Poore, 2011). Too frequently, there is an emphasis on the technical knowledge of teachers, and not developing other aspects that support the all-around well being of the mind and individual. Concentration on both areas, would lead to a more beneficial educational practice**.**

It is important to turn our attention to how digital technologies can be used in class so that students gain both technical and critical digital literacy for engagement with the new knowledge space. Creativity can be applied, as educators use their own digital literacy to create more fulfilling learning experiences that are ethical and intellectually stimulating. Educators must be provided with the opportunities to foster their philosophical and ethical frameworks for comprehending digital cultures, and they can utilize the frameworks to guide the way they teach. It does not matter how such a practice gets presented in a classroom, but students should learn how to participate more meaningfully online, and learn how to decipher what requires their engagement and participation from what does not.

Students today are digital media savvy and proficient, but this proficiency does not translate necessarily into critical engagement and understanding of the broad, complex, and compelling issues of digital culture. Students should be educated comprehensively on how to create and consume digital culture, as well as learn how to utilize the digital means for communication and collaboration. Students also need to contribute responsibly to the collective intelligence of the knowledge space, by having a better understanding of themselves and a mutual understanding of others. According to Hartley (2009), institutions of education must lead the way to show young students how to make the most of digital media, instead of how to make the least of it. By doing that, students would be flourishing, as Freire would have it.

Shaping a Media Literacy Curriculum

The main themes of media education in British Columbia, Canada, are identified as follows: "media products (purpose, values, representation, codes, conventions, characteristics, production), audience interpretation and influence (interpretation, influence of media on audience, influence of audience on media), media and society (control, scope)" (Media Smarts, 2016, "Value of Integrating Media Education"). There is nothing contentious about what already exists in the current curriculum. However, the issue is that it is not taught as a separate curriculum, which could benefit students. A media literacy curriculum, informed by the work of Dewey and Freire can position student involvement in positive social change as its main goal. Thevenin and Mihailidis (2012) envision such a media literacy curriculum. The framework does not have to be interpreted as the only criteria for an effective social activism oriented initiative. However, it could address some of the points that follow.

Objective

The objective could be students' exercise of critical thinking and attainment of media analysis and production skills, which are essential to existing approaches to media education. Also, essential is the conception that media are created by and contribute to broader social, cultural, economic and political relations. However, it is not enough to perceive critical thinking, media analysis, and production as the final goal. It is important that students also realize these are skills they must master and utilize to take on social injustices, cultural crises, economic issues, political differences.

Pedagogy

In terms of pedagogy, striving to make the classroom more democratic and legitimize students' knowledge and experience are key aspects of media literacy education. Using an approach to education that encourages students to be independent in citing social issues that peak their interest is important. Students should be able to formulate an informed opinion about these cases utilizing media analysis, and getting involved with these issues through media production. Initiatives that could be effective, would immerse media education with civic engagement, so that it enables students to cite, assess, and address issues in their respective communities.

Context

Media literacy education location is contextually variable, as it can occur in a high school, undergraduate university course, an after-school program, a library or a museum, and more. Acknowledgement of the context is important. The program's time and place, supplies, dynamics of classroom, institutional structures and rules, as well as representation of a variety of perspectives and experiences should be discussed. In addition, how all these things impact students' engagement in topics of media and society, must also be in the discussion.

Content

The curricula for media literacy should be flexible. Current initiatives often address a variety of media content including entertainment, journalism, and advertising. The initiatives also go through different media modes such as radio, television or internet, as

well as the formal elements that include sound, visuals, and text. Methods of media analysis that include political-economic, feminist, and critical/theoretical can also be taken on. It is essential, however, that student education is comprehensive, and that it includes media organizations, messages and audiences. The discussion of media that take place must also be placed within broader discussions of culture and society, as well as economics and politics. Critical issues and controversies in media should get examined as part of communication and social change, citizenship, and consumer culture. Issues related to modernism, postmodernism, and popular culture can also be explored.

Product

Public Service Announcements, digital stories, documentaries and personal inventories, can all serve as final student projects. The goal would be the acquisition as well as the development of new media production skills, and the application of students' critical thinking skills utilized in their research to the production of the text. The text would "account for the anticipated impact of the medium, mode, form, and content of their creation, and to engage with not only the perspectives voiced in the discourse relating to their issue but the people (preferably in their own community)" who are vocalizing those perspectives (Thevenin and Mihailidis, 2012, p. 67-68). The projects of students can empower them to engage with problems troubling society, in addition to them utilizing critical thinking, media analysis and production skills to solve those problems.

Evaluation

There are constantly new approaches being developed to assessing the value of media education programs, using data collection both qualitatively and quantitatively. However, it is essential that students engage in a discussion about the obstacles they confront or the successes they experience, as well as new information they find and the new knowledge they gain.

Thevenin and Mihailidis (2012) remind us that this framework is not an exhaustive list of essential characteristics of a media literacy education curriculum which can be re-thought. However, they see "some potential in an activism-oriented program as the means of using media education to encourage young people to be more informed, critical, and concerned with social issues that matter to them" (Thevenin and Mihailidis, 2012, p. 68). What is not addressed in the framework, or hardly emphasized, is the role of the teacher. Dewey and Freire felt that the teacher needs to play a critical role as an assistive guide in order to reach desired goals, and this can be achieved in part by keeping cordial relations. The student can be encouraged to ask questions along the way, which is consonant with Freire's arguments.

Conclusion

Dewey and Freire have similar views on society and education, even though each thinker belongs to a different culture and time in history. They felt the traditional ways of thinking of our society's members impede much educational and societal progress as students are categorized, for example, as either bright or dull. Such categorization refutes

the existence of a development or learning process, which leads to forgoing the course of becoming literate or becoming knowledgeable by simply being one or the other without fail. Both philosophers of course, believed that oppression needs to be eradicated for the achievement of a democratic society. The values of development, and increased interaction between teachers and students can be incorporated to the pedagogy of today, and a media literacy curriculum that integrates these values is no exception. Traditional schooling has led to teachers and students adopting roles that do not advance a progressive and comprehensive educational project toward ongoing projects of social change. Students, their interests, and what they have to offer in an educational or societal setting are all diverse, and this diversity should be accommodated. Dewey and Freire felt that there can not be hope for improved conditions in education or society by passively letting the world be as it is, and making it better requires a change in attitude towards one another. Both, Dewey and Freire argued forcefully that education means a challenge to status quo approaches to pedagogy, and ongoing revision of the project and purpose of education in terms of broad social change.

In the views of Dewey and Freire, there always needs to be greater responsibilities understood and met on the parts of both students and teachers. Freire, in particular, envisioned education to be dialogic, and he urged educators to not think of students as merely objects. He wanted teachers to think of their students as a source of knowledge, and for education as a whole to become participatory. Students need to be encouraged and enabled to think of themselves as active, key and responsible in their own education, and in a broader project of societal change through education. As we move along further in the digital age, we have to use informed strategies that lead to what Freire referred to

as “human flourishing”; that is being concerned with our capacity to prosper with others and to acknowledge their humanity and ours, as much as it is also about understanding and responding to the human condition. Educators must participate in meaningful debates regarding digital cultures, which critically reflect on how students engage digitally. Educators must be literate enough, and socially/politically engaged enough to define and guide critical engagement and understanding of digital culture, and to enable their students to match their technical proficiencies with their critical proficiencies.

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Media Education History, Currency, and Future in British Columbia: A Review and Analysis of the Foundations, Relevance, and Scope of Media Education for the Digital Age

Introduction

The exploration of media education reveals that media literacy is critical to understanding the pervasiveness and compelling influence of media environments, including digital environments, in which children participate. Research presented in this essay also indicates that media education has a significant role in the positive development of children as it shapes their thought processes, and that the subject matter itself can be a key factor to their academic success. The history of media education from British Columbia, as discussed in this essay, reveal some key developments, which include the work of selected individuals and organizations in establishing the foundations and instigating and guiding the development of media education in British Columbia. The primary research conducted for this essay focus on answering four questions:

(1) What is media education about today?

(2) What are the urgent and critical needs in media education?

(3) What are the directions in which media education is headed in the shifting grounds and accelerated pace of change in contemporary digital media environments?

(4) What are the policy environments we have to engage with to advance media education?

The primary research focuses on "conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation" (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 3), and therefore, this essay obtains input from three key respondents. Two university level educators who teach in the area of media

education were interviewed, and interviews with these academics studying media education helped answer the first three questions: One advocacy group member was approached to help answer the fourth research question. This individual was in a leadership role for a non-profit organization, which helped give insight into the strategy for implementing educational programs. The key people to approach, and challenges presented in such implementation was also discussed. This individual also helped answer the second question listed above.

The secondary research conducted for this essay includes a discussion on pornography, as two interviewees mentioned that it should get some attention in classroom discussion, where it is usually avoided as a topic. Youth have access to pornography through the Internet and digital means/culture like never before, and there is controversy surrounding it, but people still feel uncomfortable discussing it as a topic. Another topic that is worthy of some attention is how diversity gets perceived and treated through the media. Under the larger umbrella of visual media literacy, the topic of Muslim women is focused on and how these women are projected and understood gets explored. In our diverse society, it becomes vitally important to have such literacy for the sake of social justice as people from different backgrounds, genders, and sexual orientation need to feel they are welcome and have the same opportunities as others in society.

Key Historical Media Education Developments in British Columbia

The Canadian Association of Media Education (CAME) was formed in 1991. The National Film Board of Canada (NFB), Mediawatch, and the Knowledge Network,

supported the creation, and so did numerous teachers. CAME's objectives were as follows:

- To educate Canadians about the media
- To promote media education
- To encourage Canadian cultural expression in the media (Blake, 2001, p. 40)

CAME became known for facilitating many forums on media issues. John Pungente, a leading Canadian media educator, was invited in 1994 to head a two-week media education summer institute. In attendance were thirty educators from the Vancouver area. Also in 1994, CAME entered into a contract to generate the conceptual framework for British Columbia's Media Education (kindergarten to grade 12), which aimed to assist in curriculum revisions that were needed. Later that year, the Provincial Ministry of Education started revising the entire curricula. CAME members were involved in the incorporation of Media Education Learning Outcomes, which was considered the most successful in the area of English Language Arts (Blake, 2001). Prescribed learning outcomes that showed a connection between subject matter and media became a part of each revised curriculum document. Media Education also became one of many cross-curricular topics that were added on to every curriculum area. There were a few obstacles with efforts to incorporate media education in all curricula. One problem was that there were insufficient print and video resources for educators. The other was that pre-service and in-service teachers did not have adequate training in the area. Unless they had interest in the role of media in society, teachers did not really deal with the topic.

In 1995, a full credit course at Simon Fraser University was offered in the education department at the graduate level on the topic of media literacy, which was co-sponsored by CAME. Two resource samplers, including lesson plans and strategies for teaching in the media education area were published by CAME by that time.

While interest in media education grew between 1995 and 2000, there was a dearth of training resources and opportunities. As Blake (2001) states:

> A small number of teachers opted for the full credit courses at SFU, but it's doubtful if more than 1000 out of the 40,000 teachers in the province have ever been exposed, in a formal way, to strategies for teaching students about the role the media plays in shaping perceptions of the world. (p. 41)

There was an understanding that post-secondary institutions were not likely to make media literacy a mandatory component in pre-service teacher training. Anti-racist education and aboriginal education are examples of topics that other interest groups would like to also have been incorporated in the training. As far as in-service teachers were concerned, the only training in teaching about the media would be coming from workshops or conferences.

Additional Initiatives

Pacific Cinematheque took the initiative to develop and implement programs of in-service training in British Columbia. Previously an art-house movie theatre, Pacific Cinematheque acquired permission to do film education at the secondary level in schools in 1996. This happened simultaneously with the National Film Board's Education Office shutting down. The Education Officer for Pacific Cinematheque at the time, Stuart

Poyntz, had been promoting film education and was active in trying to work with teachers to find out their needs. “He has identified curriculum links with contemporary films, developed strategies to encourage students and teachers to examine how film works to tell stories and encouraged extensive discussion of pop culture iconography” (Blake, 2001, p. 41).

The Student Film and Video Festival and the Gulf Island Film and Video School were some of the other initiatives in relation to film education. As part of a school course, the Student Film and Video Festival introduced student film and video productions and was held as an annual event. The Gulf Island Film and Video School provided weekend residential courses which target mainly the production process, but also incorporate media literacy discourse. In collaboration with the Knowledge Network, Stuart Poyntz created a history of film project as well.

According to Blake (2001), there were two developments in the recent years dating up to 2001, which brought awareness to the importance of media education. The first development concerns the corporate intrusion (advertising) into provincial schools. Selling and advertising of soft drinks on school property faced some opposition, as it was not considered healthy consumption for students**.** Another case that can be cited is the Youth News Network (YNN) launching only a twelve-minute news broadcast with 2 and a half minutes of advertising to high schools. It triggered many provinces, including British Columbia, to ban YNN from broadcasting to schools. The second significant development bringing awareness to media education was the creation of Coalition Opposing Violent Entertainment (COVE), which included The British Columbia

Teachers' Federation, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, End the Arms Race, and Mediawatch, as members. Steven Kline, a scholar at Simon Fraser University, stressed that COVE's main objective should be to bring awareness about the violent and anti-social matter in video games targeted to children.

Up until 2001, teaching about the function of media in society was mostly a consequence of individual initiatives that were limited. Considering the re-work of curriculum that occurred between 1994 through to 1998, CAME has not really been considered a major success in further promoting media education. According to Blake (2001), "The challenge of bringing teachers interested in media education together in a single organization remains the biggest obstacle to the advancement of media education in British Columbia" (p. 41).

Insight through Interviews: Findings and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, interviews were conducted with three key respondents, who are accomplished in media education related work. Two university level educators who teach in the area of media education, and one advocacy group member were interviewed. The advocacy group member works in a management role for her organization. All interviews used a formal set of questions, as listed in the Appendix of this essay, with unscheduled probes, which are extra questions to obtain more detail. The responses have varied, so each of the interviews is presented with its own findings and discussion section.

Educator 1

Educator 1 discusses the definitions, foundations, role and significance of media education. He also reflects on meeting the aims of media education, the influence of Hannah Arendt, issues with the Internet, the involvement of government and other organizations, discussion of pornography in school, and the challenges with or without media education in student's lives.

Meeting the Aims of Media Education

The first educator interviewed stated there were two major things to keep in mind when teaching a course on media education. Firstly, that it is intended for a young audience. He mentioned that the experience of growing up has changed, since his childhood. There was no digital media around, but now it exists and it produces risk conditions in young peoples' lives. According to him, critical forms of media intervention are intended to address and help young people respond to these risk conditions. The second major thing to keep in mind, he said, is questioning what is the notion of pedagogy behind media literacy. Students, at the university level, explore the work of Paulo Freire, and think about dialogue as opposed to discussion, for example. Dialogue is concerned with trying to find a shared connection, as opposed to advocating your own viewpoints or challenging those of others. Problem-based learning is also a focal point to Freire's work, and can be used to inform media education work. Problem-based learning is not focused on a defined solution, but on students' constructing their own learning through reflection and reasoning.

This educator said there is another piece to his media education course, which is the broad concept of curation. Media education can be comprehended as the attempt to

curate critical forms of learning where thinking, judging and an experience of worldliness are enabled for a target demographic. He said students have a choice: either they can develop media literacy curriculum or an analysis of projects that use media as a vehicle of critical intervention, or they can design a piece of media themselves, such as a video, which serves the same purpose.

Influence of Hannah Arendt

The overarching question of this educator's course is: what is meant by criticality? He said, "Media education is thought of as a project of critical analysis and production – and if that is the popular conception – what is it that we mean by criticality?" The educator said drawing from the work of Hannah Arendt and her discussion of public life, provides the backdrop and anchor for the course. He proceeded to state:

> The goal is to pull back the veil and see the world in more truthful ways. The problem you face is often whose truth really matters? Ideology is that the truth of the teacher is what matters. However, students need to have a sense that the way they understand and imagine the world is not nearly what it could be. (Educator 1, University).

He explained that what Arendt claims about truth, is that how people read the truth about media can become their own source of power. Illustrations can be used by professors and they can tell student to look at how much a particular piece of media is an illusion, and not reality, for example. By doing this, professors are empowered. Educator 1 is concerned with what happens when professors are not around, and how students make sense of things. He thinks it is far important to be concerned with how students use and employ media education in their lives when they leave the university.

According to Educator 1, the work of Arendt reminds us that truth doesn't serve the ends of democracy, since people in power can often lay claim to truths that are counterproductive to democracy. Media literacy at its best, opens complexity. Educator 1 thinks that media literacy opens up the stories and images and ideas that young people don't know are out there in the world. Further, he argues that media literacy also enriches, and allows students to think critically about things that they already know. Popular media, music, and social media are examples of what young people feel at ease with. Educator 1 said one of the challenges is, "How do you make politics something that is sensible and of concern to young people, who see themselves as apolitical, without the intelligence or capability to engage in politics? How do you shift that ground?" He feels the goal is that when the professor is not around anymore, students should start exploring things and developing programs, and projects on their own.

Issues with the Internet

Educator 1 believes the assumption that the internet is enabling of democracy should be questioned, since there is considerable evidence/analysis that tells us that the Internet can operate in ways that are quite counterproductive to democracy. Despite its commonplace familiarity, the Internet can produce new kinds of risks, danger or managed lives. Educator 1 thinks media literacy has a role in debunking the idea that Internet is always a resource in the service of democracy. He said digitization, from social media and mobiles to "app" ecologies, has enabled a number of communication practices to impact democracy, action, and social movements as well. It also impacts public issues, which he said twenty years ago wasn't possible unless you had access to professional filmmakers or broadcasters. Working with the Internet can be done in powerful ways. As

he argues, “For example, activists, artists and academics once got together to equip Mexican migrants coming across the border with mobile GPS systems so that they could find safe spots along the way.” He adds, “these were consumer level cheap phones.”

According to Educator 1, regulations to manage certain conduct on the Internet is important, and public regulation and public institutions need to be involved in that work. Reflecting on the history, he mentioned that the Internet, came through corporations, including Internet Explorer or Safari. He feels the Internet has been experienced as a corporate public space, and the role of regulators has been often thought of as inappropriate. He elaborates:

> It has been conceived that regulators have no place in the open society of the Internet, and that’s not helpful for us. There is a whole series of acts of violence related to gender, and race that are used through the Internet that are quite dangerous. There is the whole question of surveillance that has to be answered and regulated. Risks that youth have from strangers when they go online, and risks from access to content such as porn that is not healthy. Cyberbullying is also dangerous. (Educator 1, University)

There is public injustice around these issues, especially to children who are vulnerable and in need of protection. He feels those issues, with the exception of pornography, are less pressing issues than they have been in the past. He points out that families are often speaking to their children about the issues, but it doesn’t mean we are necessarily in a ‘golden age.’

Educator 1 stated that a lot more work needs to be done on pornography, since young people’s lives, identities, sense of intimacy, sexuality, as well as their sense of

togetherness is questioned through it. Pornography is re-shaping those relationships and there is a lot of confusion around it. He stated:

> The reason – whenever we think of porn in young people – the reaction is always: "Can you believe what kids are able to watch these days?". That kind of moral panic doesn't actually help to make sense of what is actually going on where young people and pornography is concerned. Therefore, what kind of program, project or intervention is best in that context needs to be determined. So, it's best to keep porn separate from all those other issues [concerning children]. (Educator 1, University)

Involvement of Government and Other Organizations

Regulation is often thought of as the responsibility of the government. However, Educator 1 thinks that in conjunction with public regulators, it is also an important role for not-for-profit or community level organizations to link policies and practices with children and their communities. His fear is that if everything is controlled by the government, the government becomes too involved in controlling and managing lives. He thinks government should play a role with key players in different cities, including school boards, major foundations or organizations that work with school boards. These public organizations operate to address issues about the Internet and children's lives. Educator 1 points out that currently, many of those themes and issues are only addressed through the actions of private corporations like Facebook or Google, and their regulations around privacy or cyberstalking, and issues of representation. He thinks when these regulations come from corporations, they serve their own interests and not the broad public. On the other hand, he said, "Youngsters have a difficult time making that argument or identifying with that argument because there has been such a pull back over the last 20

years around the role of public regulation in shaping media, whether its broadcast media or online media."

According to Educator 1, advertising and branding of children's culture and media needs to be addressed as well the way that surveillance of teenagers operates in public institutions including schools and the streets. He felt that in several countries, teenagers don't feel like they belong in public life/space or on the street. He states with regret:

> 30 years ago, kids in places such as Toronto would go out on the street, go downtown, in subways, and music stores. Today, students live often in bedroom cultures, since digital media provides access to worlds without having to leave your house or residence. Part of the problem is that kids are not always welcome in public space. Places need to exist, where kids are welcomed and encouraged to make it their own. (Educator 1, University)

In the past, media education has been known to be concerned with learning how to critically read the world through various media, such as television or advertisements. Educator 1 feels media literacy is not limited to engaging with traditional forms of media anymore. Media literacy is also about taking part in the creation of the present state of the world, or making a difference. Educator 1 emphasizes that organizations that do a lot of media creation work with that goal in mind are not often schools. Those organizations can be art galleries, community/health centers, aboriginal groups, or immigrant service societies. The tools students in collaboration with the organizations includes cameras, word press, or social media are to talk about various experiences. Educator 1 feels those

organizations need to be funded in ways that allow them to stabilize, expand, and work in different cities in more significant ways. He states:

> Cities such as Toronto, and London, and countries such as Australia, U.S., Korea, Japan, and parts of China, have the availability of cameras, Instagram, and podcasting that has enabled young people to circulate culture in important ways. The groups that do such work with teenagers are very poorly funded without the ability to grow and get better at what they are doing. Rather than just funding public media like CBC, those groups should be funded. (Educator 1, University)

Discussion of Pornography in School

When questioned if there are there any topics that Educator 1 feels he could include in his course, he mentioned pornography would be one of them. He thinks themes of sexuality, desire, and pleasure have always been avoided, and that questions around sex should get some attention. He states:

> There are so many reasons why media education needs to dig into this area in an interesting way. In the late 80's, early 90s, the role of feminism and gender politics was extremely important in my life. Ideas and lessons learned from that era have disappeared. The way feminism has been absorbed into the culture is done in a very thin manner. (Educator 1, University)

Educator 1, said that pornography is not necessarily bad, but also acknowledges the fraught nature and complexities of the issue. However, he is certain that people are very afraid of it, and that its existence is not good. Youngsters have absorbed pornography as part of the digital culture they have grown up in. Even those who want to avoid it or claim to avoid it, are aware of pornography's existence and accessibility. Educator 1

thinks pornography has a role in how young people learn a kind of bio-politics, in terms of thinking of and treating bodies. He suggests that covering a topic such as pornography is extremely important and relevant in the lives of students.

The Challenges: With or Without Media Education

Educator 1 thinks one of the the biggest challenges for media education is that it has gone global. He mentioned that UNESCO, for example, has a huge initiative about developing a global program in media and information literacy that can be integrated into any number of international contexts. He proceeded to describe the problem:

> So imagine a curriculum that can be taken into national film institutes, schools, and business training centers. The problem with that is when you develop this at that scale and global reach, it loses its centre, and becomes so general that it can fit anywhere. It loses its politics and connection with powerful meanings, and the role of power in peoples lives. Media literacy is about meaning and power. What meanings for whom, and how much, and about power and who gets what and how. (Educator 1, University)

The Fear is that media education is becoming a global project and that it will lose its substance.

Educator 1 thinks that media education should begin in elementary school. The things that bring meaning in students' lives besides school such as clothes, advertising culture, mobile phones, and social media online are all texts worth reflecting on. Educator 1 stated some texts can be music, digital, or narrative, but children need multiple literacies. In the absence of such education, school becomes increasingly isolated from the dominating experiences in young peoples' lives. Educator 1 said many children will

admit that they understood school, and what they need to do to succeed, but they don't necessarily like it.

The key things students need to learn by the time they complete High School, according to Educator 1, include the need to be taught how the ideas they carry around with them become naturalized or taken for granted. He said students also need to know that their ideas, and their relationships are inherited from a world of representations. These representations need to be learned about and they relate to the many texts mentioned earlier. Educator 1 mentions how Facebook operates as an example of what students should know about:

> Why is Facebook so rigorous about eliminating false identities? They want us, the more of us they have, the more Facebook there is and the more money there is. How is it that representations work in the media to shape key relationships? School should equip kids with that. (Educator 1, University)

If students don't get media education early enough in their lives, the most significant consequence, according to Educator 1, is that people turn away from a connected sense of responsibility and curiosity about others that are not like them. Students become private, close-minded, or thoughtless. Educator 1 thinks thoughtlessness permits people to remain content in their own worlds, and remain arrogant about what they think they know. Routine continues in students' lives, without any reflection. Educator 1 stated, "Media literacy produces thoughtfulness. For example, why is it that it is like this? It is a tremendously important habit called thinking. People don't do that all the time."

Educator 1 thinks the future of media education is linked to globalization as mentioned earlier, and the whole struggle around how globalization shapes this education. He said media education is discussed by professionals, non-professionals, parents and academics as the basic element of how young people prepare themselves for the kind of world we live in. Peoples' lives are very mediated, and media education is a kind of response to it, so there is a lot of excitement generated around media education. Educator 1 thinks the excitement will keep growing. However, "The worry is what's growing and where is it headed to. And that is where the struggle around globalization seems so important" (Educator 1, University).

Summary

There are concerning matters associated with the new media (digital), such as cyberbullying or access to pornography, which require attention. Public organizations other than the government need to share this concern, and get involved in the process of regulation of the Internet. Private organizations tend to be concerned with their own interests. The major challenge facing media education is that it is becoming a global project, instead of adhering to what is important in a local context. The absence of media education in students' lives can produce thoughtlessness or irresponsible behavior, and students can feel more disconnected with school. Media education benefits from using suitable pedagogical approaches, which are guided by influential thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Hannah Arendt.

Educator 2

Educator 2 discusses the present education on media related courses, and how it is changing. She elaborates on this change and the direction it should go in in the first

section below titled “Shifting Focus of Media Education.” She also discusses the pitfalls of being in a digital age, as well as the Internet’s potential for greater things, in the second section titled “Nature of Online Activity.”

Shifting Focus of Media Education

The second educator said the main aim of her course on media education is to cover critical theory, which has always been the traditional direction at her educational institution. She said the course is taught with the realization that media is run by those who have power, and are part of mainstream media, rather than the abundance of online alternative and “Do It Yourself” media. The course also focuses on helping students manage relations online, and be more active as presenting themselves as citizens. She said there is lots of discussion of digital media, as well as traditional media. According to her, teaching International students or students that come from poorer areas can be more of a challenge as they may not be as familiar with the media or cultural products.

Educator 2 feels that there is substantial emphasis on critical theory at the institution she teaches in, but not enough on application. She elaborates:

> Managing relations online, and citizen journalism is able to contribute to the public sphere, but more focus on the ‘how to’. A Facebook page can be created, but how can you create traffic, make things viral, and create things related to a cause. There should be more of a balance. (Educator 2, University)

There seems to be a disconnect between what is learned in school, and what is practiced by the work force in the communication field. Bridging this gap is important to prepare students for jobs.

Educator 2 said as the media landscape is changing, so are the social norms and practices. People are dealing with others digitally or online, and this is influencing how they interact face-to-face. She said, "Bridging this gap is also something you can look at. For example, it is very easy to say harsh things online, but in real life it doesn't happen."

Educator 2 feels that students need to be media literate before entering university. She points out that 5 or 6 year olds have IPads, for instance, and they need to grow up being able to navigate the world they are in. It is important for her that students have social values and awareness, and to ensure they don't go down the wrong path.

Nature of Online Activity

In terms of online participation, students should engage both critically and creatively online. Internet is a dynamic space in which people are able to voice what they feel and be heard. People are able to stand behind causes, and gain support for those causes or initiatives. Students need to be pushed to do more of the positive things that the Internet allows them to do. Educator 2 stated, "Because students don't have the ethical foundation to broadcast themselves as people have been doing in TV or radio, they need to be responsible political actors". The students need to structure their online behavior in a more constructive manner. By the time students complete high school, she said students should have learned how to work with social media in meaningful ways. According to her, social media has become our world and there is no way you can denounce it.

There are harmful consequences of students not getting media education in a timely way in their lives. Educator 2 mentions that cyberbullying has caused teenagers to kill themselves, for example. Students need to know where to draw the line, and when to

be held accountable. Students also need to able to navigate the norms and practices of the online world, and be able to relate to others in the online world.

Digital cultures are mainly being discussed by educators and they become the focus of media education. As it relates to the future of media education, Educator 2 felt education related to traditional media has been left behind. It remains to be seen which direction education for the media field goes because people or not tuning in to television or reading print as frequently.

Summary

At present, there is too much focus on critical theory, and not enough on application in media education, as students prepare to enter the workforce. There should be more of a balance. The digital culture that the youth are immersed in needs attention, since there are dangers associated with what students are exposed to or what occurs online. On the other hand, the Internet can be an empowering tool, if students try to channel their efforts in positive ways. While there is still discussion of traditional media in classrooms, the focus is shifting increasingly on digital media.

Advocacy Group Member

The advocacy group member interviewed discusses her organization's mission, the change in British Columbia Curriculum, her organization's assistance in media education, the issues impacting media education offerings, and the variation in student groups being taught. She also reflects on the current British Columbia curriculum and her organization' involvement, and areas that are still in need of focus for media education.

Non-profit Organization's Mission

The advocacy group member interviewed said the mission of her organization is to advance film as an art form and as a means of communication. The organization is involved with exhibitions, education, outreach programs, and also has a library that has educational resources. The organization is mainly concerned with what is produced from filmmakers locally and around the world.

Change in BC Curriculum

The advocacy group member feels that because there are many different educators teaching media education at the secondary level, there is a lack of consistency in terms of what is being taught. She said the British Columbia curriculum is about to go through a radical shift, and there has been a new curriculum that has been rolled out from Kindergarten to grade 9 this past year. It is a gradual rollout and there is going to be another one for grades 10 through 12, and the curriculum incorporates elements of media education and project based learning. She adds that there would be cross-curricular integrations and other elements that coordinate effectively with media education approaches and curricula.

Non-profit Organization's Assistance in Media Education

The advocacy group member said her organization does media literacy workshops where the goal is to stimulate thinking and discussion, and expose kids to schools of thought that they haven't been exposed to before. Topics could include consumerism, and gender representation. The advocacy group member said that the ways people engage with the media are very different. It is hard to talk about things like violence because there is easily a moral panic. She explains that what disturbs one person can be totally

fine for another person. She argues that youth "don't want to be told you should be doing this or that, and you shouldn't be doing this or that. They also don't really care."

The advocacy member points out that there is very little conversation going on about sexualized content and pornography:

> Students are consuming pornography in droves, and massive content or quantities. You may find a limited discussion going on in the sexual health education workshops that are offered. Issues that come up are one of consent, and what the meaning of consent even is. Often pornography has people acting, and often you might see them acting as they are enjoying something, when in reality it might be unpleasant or painful. It caters to the kind of audience that might be interested in that particular act. So counselors and teachers are claiming that kids are thinking they are able to like it and not articulate enough to express that they don't enjoy it. But they have seen it so many times that they think that is what they are supposed to do.

Even though there are kids with extremely healthy sexual relationships, there are many that are confused about sex. The advocacy group member said that the areas not being addressed are the taboo or confusing territories, and teachers may feel uncomfortable approaching taboo subjects.

A lot of her organization's workshops provide frameworks that can be used to engage students in some of the discussions that the teacher is not comfortable with.

The advocacy member said that the role media education can play in a student's education can vary significantly. There are instances where she feels students can have their entire schooling and never talk about the media much and what media are

consuming. Other times, she says, it feels like media education is deeply integrated with their literature units and social study units.

The advocacy member finds students do well with technology and the technical aspects of their projects, but they find other aspects challenging. She explains:

> We have a population that has been exposed to technology since infancy. How to use an iPad or how to make a video – that is the easy part, where education system is doing well. But the grey zones, where teachers approach the organization and say I don't have the time or the ability to do this, needs the focus. The technical part of a project such as a video will be easy, but the content is where more effort is needed. If it is replacing an essay, it needs to b more meaningful.

The advocacy group member said her organization is brought in to help students showcase their learning and knowledge through the language of cinema, but not necessarily have them seek the organization for expertise on the topic. The teachers should concentrate on helping the students with the topic.

Issues Impacting Media Education Offerings

According to the advocacy group member, there are provinces other than British Columbia that offer a separate curriculum on media education. It is not always a core area, but students often have the option to take a separate course. There are film and media studies in British Columbia schools, but not every school has the offering. She says the curriculum is in the process of changing, but it mostly focuses on the 'how-to' or technical aspect. Broader discussion of films takes place, but only in a few schools. Surprisingly, she said interest needs to be generated from students, so that the teacher can offer it. If enough students get interested, then the course also gets offered. Even though,

the understanding is that this is not formally how curriculum in any jurisdiction is introduced and approved. The advocacy member also discusses the funding aspect:

> Funding and allocation come into play when you consider media production. Everyone can use an iPad, but what if you want students to produce something better quality wise. Sometimes active parent advisory councils will do fundraising. And there can be a real disparity between schools.

The advocacy group member cites the example of Kitsilano Secondary School. The school had their theatre under construction, so the school decided to take all the revenue from the previous year's theatre production and make a TV show with it. According to the advocacy group member, the school bought a lot of equipment, including two very high end cameras, expensive sound gear, since it had a $30,000 budget. She said the school spent it all, and got the entire school involved. She mentions as a side note that the TV show is not going to be broadcast, but emphasizes that it was driven by the students, and the students were in charge of it. She mentions that extensive funding makes such endeavors possible. She also clarifies, "Beyond using your phone, and YouTube, it is up to the youth and what they value. They might aspire to go on traditional media, but if not, it doesn't matter. They can be encouraged with whatever they're interested in."

Variation in Student Groups

The advocacy group member said there are a variety of students her organization works with. One group the organization works with includes marginalized students. This group is comprised of students who lack representation in the mass media or poor representation through media, and those who feel that the current curriculum does not engage them or doesn't use strategies and techniques that engage them. The advocacy

member said the group can include students with learning disabilities as well. She stated there is a mixed bag group which includes all kinds of students, and also a gifted student group. She credited the power of media to engage diverse groups, and said film, and media, can be a great motivator.

Curriculum Reflections and Non-profit Organization' Involvement

In her discussion of the current curriculum, the advocacy group member said that curriculum documents can be vague, but that may be intentional to encourage teachers to figure out what to do together. She said that the curriculum is very open, fluid, and it remains to be seen how it is interpreted and applied within classrooms, groups, and schools. Integration into other subjects is now being encouraged, and the cross-curricular aspect is coming together as teachers are collaborating with other teachers.

The advocacy group member argued that policy must be informed by the social and cultural lives of students themselves. From offering coding courses, to taking on media analysis and anti-bullying issues, schools should do their part in offering what is important to students. The advocacy group member stated, "It is not easy to assume that some of those things are being handled the way they should be through parents. But some parents may feel it is their responsibility, so schools don't need to get into these issues." She mentioned that clearer roles for schools can be established formally through policy. She thinks the most exciting part of policy is the cross curricular aspect, since it encourages organizations such as hers to step in, and teachers collaborate and think about how media is part of the landscape. She said the main subject where there is overlap or integration of media education is English, and not so much in Social Studies. According to her, 90 per cent of what her organization does is related to the English curriculum, and

the rest is Social Studies. Some of the time Fine Arts groups will invite her organization to do supplementary work. Some have a visual arts program, but don't have any film component, so the organization is invited to help out. She elaborated on how her organization gets involved with schools:

> Sometimes, it occurs at the organization's premise for half day workshop or sometimes it is several half days at schools doing a mini video production unit. Or we may go into several classes and continue an analytical curricular area or train of thought. Other times, we are there for a week or like in the summer, for 2 weeks, where there is an intensive video production unit. Sometimes it is custom designed for topic such as political advertising, racism or diversity.

Areas in Need of Focus

The Advocacy Group Member observes that the barriers to advocating for this cause in the past has been time and staffing. She said her organization is actually so busy doing its work, that we they don't get the chance to approach the provincial government. She states, "I advocate on the ground level, but never by approaching the government. That's why I am at a lot of conferences talking to teachers." She does not advocate for more organizations like hers, but rather, she would like to see extensive professional development in media education. She regrets that, "there is no funding for that or it does not exist in the giant overhaul in curriculum. Overnight, it doesn't happen."

The advocacy group member feels a lot more support from parents is needed to advance the cause of media education, since many educators seem to be on board already. She finds that educators take charge by encouraging critical thinking in the classroom:

> Any subject, can have a teacher that encourages criticality. Statistics and headlines can be questioned by students. They can ask: are things really the way they are appearing on the surface? The modern media landscape is complex, diverse and messy, so it plays out in every single area of our lives because it is all mediated through it.

Outside of British Columbia, the United Kingdom appears to have an excellent media education program, according to the advocacy group member. She said, unfortunately however, unless a person is in the classroom, it is hard to judge who is doing what effectively. She feels that unless a mass scale survey of all the teachers is done, it is hard to actually know what is happening in the classrooms. She said, "It is just a select few that are doing it because they are passionate about it as is the case with us. We just never know what is happening across the board." She stated that UK has a fantastic model, but it should also be effective in eradicating some of the issues such as racism in the society. For British Columbia, on the other hand, the concrete goal is to build skills though, and not necessarily to delve into some of those complex and controversial areas. She feels that the government can step in and assess whether the educational agenda is working or not, in terms of attainment of media analysis and production skills.

Summary

Media education in schools can not always be comprehensive, and the work of non-profit organizations can help in this regard. The organizations can assist in technical aspects, or cover topics that teachers feel uncomfortable talking about. However, the understanding of content or subject matter covered in student projects still require teachers to concentrate their efforts to improve quality of work. Media, including film,

can engage all kinds of students in powerful ways. Better funding, more support from parents, and professional development are ways to improve the present state of media education.

Pornography Explored: The Fears and Recommendations

Two of the three interviewees have mentioned that there is either very little discussion or no discussion of pornography as part of education, even though students are constantly consuming it. One interviewee (educator) actually considered the subject of pornography the most pressing issue at present, which should be discussed through media education. The discussion below reflects on what is promoted in society in regards to sexual content and how pornography is frowned upon, when the youth are part of the audience. The discussion also considers the youth's views towards pornography, which could influence how pornography gets perceived in culture or society.

Digital media and culture, in recent times, has permitted pornography and sexual content to become easily accessible to young people. A panic has emerged about what kind of impact this is having on young people. Minors becoming audiences and consumers of pornography also reflects tension related to the nature of childhood and sexuality. Egan and Hawkes (2010) claim that children have historically been thought of as 'asexual' or 'innocent' until they reach an appropriate age developmentally. However, as Buckingham and Bragg (2004) argue, people are recognizing that minors have always been sexual and it is not possible to protect them against things that are sexual. This is in contrast to regarding minors as being sexual as a result of the contemporary culture. There is a wide range of perspectives from various disciplines on the issue of the effects

of pornography on youth. However, there isn't too much research on the effect of various types of pornographic content on youth. As Buckingham and Bragg (2004), explain:

> It [research] focuses almost entirely on negative effects; it relies on simplistic assumptions about the relationships between media use, attitudes and behavior; it fails to explain why effects arise in some cases and not others; it isolates media use from other social variables, or accounts for those variables in unduly simplistic ways; it does not adequately consider how people relate media to other sources of information; and it tends to oversimplify complex questions to do with the meanings and pleasures people derive from the media. (p. 10)

Youth are familiar with pornography, and are surrounded by a commercial market revolving around sexual content, which is evident in other media such as music and film. All of this media is easily accessible to children, unless parents choose to control what the children are consuming. It also cannot be dismissed that the youth are important agents in connection with the media. As Staksrud and Livingstone (2009) point out, research indicates that the youth are aware that what they are consuming could be harmful, but understand that it is within their rights to make their own choice as a member of a 'competent' audience. At the same time, the youth also challenge what is considered risk, as there are fuzzy conceptions of harm that make up the talk of danger in public debate. Spisak (2015) states, "risk talk puzzles young people more than the actual pornographic content they have encountered. In addition, things that baffle young people in porn are significantly more diverse than those highlighted in public risk talk" (p. 138). The youth's thoughts of pornography are more complicated and nuanced than public

discussions generally conclude. Research needs to go in the direction where there is a context-sensitive strategy that evaluates the risks and possible harm. Spisak (2015) specifies:

> There is a particular need for groundwork that offers insights into how interpretations of sexually explicit media and pornography intersect with, for example, young people's age, class, ethnicity, gender identification, and sexual identification, and how these interpretations operate within peer groups, across generations and sex education within specific groups of people. (p. 138)

In order to understand the lived experiences of the youth, it is critical to asses the contextual particularities with the encounters that they have with pornography. This could assist in the analysis of the research on minors and pornography. According to Spisak (2015), quantitative research up until now assists in detecting general patterns, but are less insightful with respect to individual choices and experiences related to pornography. It is fair to conclude that very young children should not be exposed to pornography. However, Spisak (2015) thinks the older children who receive sex education and have an understanding of sex, need safe environments where there can be a discussion of sex, sexuality and pornography. This gives some guidance in terms of how they can experiment with the media they have access to for the healthy development of their own sexuality.

The Youth's Perspective

The youth regularly point out the blurriness of the so-called harm that makes up the discussion of pornography in public debate. The research shows that the youth want a more thorough and case-sensitive understanding of the impact of pornography. It also reveals that the talk of harm confuses the youth more that the porn they come across. The youth are perceived as victims or an impressionable audience that can be harmed by pornography when it is not necessarily in line with any of their experiences. The culturally appropriate attitude that youngsters should have towards pornography, is that it is sinful. Thus, when they watch pornography, they also feel guilty or ashamed. The risk talk does not take into account the ambivalent perceptions of porn or the positive experiences. Input from adolescents is avoided, and only the voice of professionals working with young people, law enforcement, health and educational agencies are considered the experts on the sexual cultures of the youth. Spisak argues that the perspectives and "sexual agency" of youth must not be ignored: "The potential carried by young people's sexual agency, and the ways in which they negotiate the ever-shifting boundaries of sexuality and gender, tends to be bypassed unless these experiences fit within the narrative of 'harmed by porn'" (Spisak, 2015, p. 134).

Visual Media Literacy in a Diverse Society

In addition to pornography discussion in media education, there is a compelling need for visual media literacy in Canada's diverse society for the sake of social justice. Groups like Muslims, including Muslim women in particular have experienced more difficulties after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. After explaining the reason for those

difficulties, the following discussion outlines the problematic associations made with the Muslim groups, role of their visual appearance in connection with the troubles experienced, as well as the importance of an intercultural strategy to education.

Media representation as it related to social justice issues became a particularly complex and compelling issue in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks. Muslims that resembled the terrorists shown on media in anyway through physical appearance or any other association became targets for discrimination. From traveling to finding employment or staying employed, it became apparent that an overwhelming amount of Muslims were feeling the impact of negative attitudes and actions towards them.

The complexities and contestations over representation of Muslim women, in particular, in western societies can and should be an issue for projects of media education. Media education has a critical role to play in developing informed and responsible representations of Muslim women in western societies. It is worth examining how the prevailing views regarding Muslim women are generated in news media sites, emphasizing links among the local and international contexts. Also, it is important to understand how meanings created through images in the media get associated with the physical appearance of Muslim women in North America. Instead of having a set of assumptions about a particular group, there is a need to investigate and understand the complexities everyone has as a separate individual.

Intercultural education is essential in the post-9/11 world. According to Macedo (2007), we find out more about issues pertaining to our society and more broadly, the world, from media discussions than from all the other sources. This makes media literacy

vitally important to negotiating the relationships people have with others of different backgrounds, both in the local and global context. Most people are not aware of ways in which they are being educated and regarded by the media since their influences are not really visible and are absorbed more unconsciously. Watt (2012) found, "This is especially so with images, whose seldom-questioned messages on otherness circulate widely." Watt (2012) further explains how the right educational agenda can help society in this respect:

> By linking intercultural education with media literacy pedagogies and a social justice agenda, it is possible to examine the unspoken role visuality plays in our social relations. A vibrant democracy depends on an informed citizenry willing and able to engage with difference within and outside national borders. (p. 32)

Considering the diversity in the Canadian classroom, there is an increasing need for intercultural conversations to occur, and critical inquiries should certainly be made into the visual representations of Muslim women in the North American media.

It might be a substantial challenge for educators to bring attention to issues related to other cultures and people that they are not familiar with. However, these complex conversations are all part of civic engagement and duty. Media literacy benefits from an intercultural approach that involves "not only the ability to critically inquire into representations of otherness, but also a willingness to situate ourselves in relation to stories being told in the media" (Watt, 2012, p. 32). Students need to comprehend the media's function and duties in a democratic society and be able to receive and respond critically to the messages. As far as intercultural education is concerned, this involves a

cognizance of how texts and images circulate and have influence and consequence in local, national, and international contexts.

In times of crisis, there is often a tendency to view the world in simplistic, dualistic terms. Distrust and fear prevailed after the tragic terrorist attacks of 9/11. For media literacy educators, Watt (2012) argues, "it is crucial to critically examine narratives that neatly divide up huge swaths of the world – and our own societies – into "us" and "them" (p. 33). Such dualism does not represent lived experiences, but it influences intercultural relations and the opportunities of marginalized groups. Obviously, more informed and sophisticated analyses of, and arguments against such simplistic binaries are critical, and media education provides one important means of achieving such analyses and insights.

The issue of creating meaning and generating identities through the visual is something that media literacy education should be concerned with. It is interesting that women who wear Islamic coverings and are automatically identified as Muslim can be judged by only that visual fact. According to Berger (1999), we acquire lots of information about another based exclusively of visual appearances, and this can lead to exclusionary practices. Watt (2012) elaborates:

> It is taken for granted that sight provides us with immediate access to the outside world. However, perception is never pure because it is always mediated by language. This means that as interpreters of "otherness" – either in face-to-face encounters or via images – we are part of the act of interpretation. The meaning of an image (or a body)

> is not inherent in the image, but is a process of exchange between the image and the viewer, whose beliefs inform one's interpretation. (p. 33)

The interpretations we have are reliant on the historical framework and the cultural knowledge we carry to perceiving a person or their photograph.

We should question what we think we know about Muslim women. Many non-Muslims view the practice of Islamic women covering themselves as a representation of male oppression, backwardness, religious fundamentalism or terrorism. The women who prefer not to wear any Islamic covering are not spared from being questioned about their Muslim heritage either. According to Watt (2012), "A woman's decision not to cover is seen by some as a sign that she is more "modern" and "open-minded" (p. 33). Furthermore, at times, it is also questioned if women are really Muslim, if they do not wear sufficient covering, including a hijab.

There are numerous women out there whose mothers never wore the hijab, yet they are choosing to do so. There is no particular, fixed Muslim female identity, but the broader public often thinks there is one. It can range from wearing western clothing with no head covering to wearing traditional outfits that have a lot more covering.

There is a real need of negotiation with others that must take place, whether the other is encountered as an actual person or simply an image. An intercultural strategy to media literacy encourages the idea that every encounter can be made in a non-judgmental way. Before the encounter, there should be no judgments passed, and a willingness to stay open to difference. We "cannot afford the stubborn refusal we sometimes encounter

from students who prefer their own comfortable worlds to confrontation with other, startlingly different worldviews" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 274).

Conclusion

As discovered through the research and interviews, there is a lack of training in media education at the pre-service level for teachers. Conferences, workshops and other in-service programs should not be the only source for educators to get their training. The growing interest and inclination of front line educators and education policy makers needs to be organized and mobilized on behalf of media education.

Media education is not offered as a full course at the secondary level, but would be beneficial to students if it were. As one interviewee pointed out, basic media education should begin as early as the elementary level.

The youth can be empowered in positive ways as they begin to think critically of what they perceive through the media. Educators in the media education field are interested in how students can begin to question things, reflect on them or derive some kind of meaning on what they receive through various forms of media. Media education is also an avenue through which the youth can try to be more politically and socially engaged, and become better citizens. As one educator pointed out, the creation and making of media should also be a part of the learning that takes place. The basics can be easy, but more sophisticated projects require technical skills to be taught.

Whether it is explicit lyrics in music or access to pornography, moral panics have surfaced often when it comes to the youth. According to the field research conducted in

this essay, it is the latter which needs more attention currently in terms of discussion in the classroom. Interviewees do not conclude whether all pornography is good or bad. However, the widely available access to it does bring up the question of how it is impacting the youth's lives, relationships, and how they view sexuality. Other supplemental research reveals that it is all the risk talk around pornography in public debate that baffles young people more so than being disturbed by what they see online.

Dualistic ways of thinking of "us" and "them" is a centuries-old issue, but this kind of thinking has increased from the U.S. after the 9/11 attacks, and has influenced intercultural interaction. Highlighted earlier is the case of Muslim women, who can vary in appearance and have others assuming many things just based on how they look. Thus, visual media literacy can also be promoted for social justice as a part of a diverse society.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions for Educators

(1) What are the topics you aim to cover in your course(s) on media education?

(2) Are there any topics you wish you could include in your course, but do not get the chance to?

(3) What are the urgent and critical needs in media education that you think may get overlooked?

(4) Do you think students could benefit from this education before entering university?

(5) (If yes) What in particular do you think is critical for students to learn by the time they complete high school?

(6) What do you think are the consequences of students not getting this education in a timely way in their lives?

(7) In the shifting grounds of the contemporary world, what are the directions in which media education is headed?

Appendix B.

Interview Questions for Advocacy Group Member

(1) What are the goals or mission of your organization?

(2) What do you think are the issues that must get addressed through media education, which are not presently getting attention at the high school level?

(3) What are the challenges of not being able provide comprehensive pedagogy that includes media education as a core course in high school?

(4) What are the policy environments we have to engage with in order to implement media education more thoroughly in high school?

(5) What have been the barriers to advocating for this cause in the past?

(6) What do you think needs to be done to accomplish this moving forward?

(7) Do you feel there is enough support from parents and educators to help this cause?

(8) Is there evidence of better and more comprehensive media education outside of British Columbia?