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***Critical Media Literacies in the Twenty-First Century:
Writing Autoethnographies, Making Connections, and
Creating Virtual Identities***

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ABSTRACT

Critical media literacies can help nurture students' creative agencies and engender positive, sustained change in local communities. Although students do need to develop faculties with digital technologies, they must also participate in critical readings of cultural artifacts and discriminate between various multimedia sources. It is important for youth to conceptualize language as perpetuating different kinds of ideologies. The proliferation of digital and mobile applications expand academic and political boundaries, for within a critical media literacies framework, reading is a collective transaction, learning is a generative act, and political engagement is an accessible achievement. This paper provides an overview of several significant studies that have interrogated the possibilities of critical media pedagogies in youth spaces. In this paper, I chart ways in which students can engage with critical media literacies, namely by (1) affording the production of meaningful and authentic autoethnographies, (2) facilitating hospitable connections with near and distant others, and 3) encouraging imaginative self-constructions of identities within virtual communities.

KEYWORDS: *critical theory, media, multiliteracies, New Literacy Studies, digital literacies*

This paper is concerned with the pedagogical practices and demonstrable benefits that come from embracing what John Mayher (1990) has called an “uncommon sense” approach to education, which necessitates a “capacity to question received wisdom—to ask why and not be satisfied with a conventional answer” (Mayher, 1990, p. 3; c.f. Rosenblatt, 1938, 145; Shor, 1999, 11; Share, 2009, 22). This theory accounts for students' personal concerns, sociocultural realities, and potential as meaning-makers. Within distinct learning communities, both learners and instructors work together to co-construct curricula, expand notions of knowledge and social capital, disrupt the distribution of damaging

stereotypes, and challenge perceived norms of struggling writers or disengaged students with counternarratives of students' capacities.

There are numerous hindrances, however, to the successful implementation of uncommon sense education in a modern era of standardization, bureaucratic power, and neoliberal impulses. The twenty-first century has ushered in an era of increased military spending, inadequate funding for the poorest public schools, eradication of anti-poverty initiatives, hyper-testing of under-stimulated youth, and insufficient resources for multilingual children (Urban, 2009).

Because their voices are so frequently undervalued and discounted, students may have difficulty achieving high levels of self-confidence or self-actualization, particularly if they are from marginalized identity groups (Muhammad & Womack, 2016). As a result, there are not enough opportunities for students to mobilize and participate in activities that promote equity. Therefore, this article identifies how educators can use critical media literacies to help students learn how to critique their worlds, have a profound voice in larger conversations, and construct purposeful digital identities. By engaging with critical media literacies, students are repositioned as change agents rather than docile learners. Promising research shows how schools shape the circumstances for uncommon sense learning.

Inscribing the Wor(l)d through Critical Media Literacies

In the 1970s, Paulo Freire famously centered his writings on critical pedagogy around the emancipation of the oppressed. He claimed that to realize a political revolution for true justice and humanization, individuals had to be self-liberated in order to become active subjects who were able to read, critique, and inscribe their own worlds. A progressive pedagogy, he believed, was critical to this social achievement of "acting upon reality" (Freire, 1970, 52). Namely, the means for marginalized populations to transact with the world depended largely on their self-perceptions and capacities as creative agents (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

Even within the context of contemporary education, however, outdated methods of instruction and uninspired pedagogical practices still persist in schools, such as the transmission of information from seemingly expert adults to passive youth through deposits of information, known as the banking method (Freire, 1970). Rather than allowing for the contestation of dominant ideologies, this model pressures students to adopt and restate mainstream ideas, while seeing their own languages and cultures as inferior. Black and Latinx students, for instance, might be viewed as possessing improper dialects or enacting deviant social behaviors because they do not fit social norms reinforced by the dominant class. The banking approach is thereby more concerned with measurable standards and preparation for an output-based capitalist society, rather than with students' imaginative power, expressions of recovery from trauma, ethical dispositions towards others, or radical restructurings of power dynamics.

James Paul Gee (2004) has noted that in a new era of "fast capitalism," innovative and highly-skilled individuals have replaced interchangeable industrial

laborers, and new networks have formed horizontally rather than vertically. Furthermore, individuals gained security in the establishment of marketable skills captured within a portfolio of skills. However, these arrangements have not eliminated socioeconomic inequities; instead, they have exacerbated social exclusions, exploitation, extreme competition, assimilation to social norms, and marketplace-driven efficiency models (New London Group, 1996; Gutierrez, 2008).

To counteract such consequences, progressive educators have encouraged students to examine sociopolitical and economic issues closely. The New London Group (1996) has proposed that young people have the capacity to be social architects who help shape their worlds through situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. Redesigning occurs in conjunction with meaning-making, linguistic designs, and the recognition of social contexts through equitable negotiations between learners and teachers. By forming co-generated dialogue and conditions for self-actualization, these methods destabilize authoritative hierarchies and enable communal healing. By participating in civic action and media literacies, students are thus able to gain access to cultures of power and critique reproductions of unequal systems (Morrell, 2008).

Notably, the field of critical media literacies incorporates ideas from Freirean pedagogy, critical theory, feminism, cultural studies, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism as tools of opposition (McLaren 2003; Sholle & Denski, 1994). By interrogating language, power relations, constructions of identity, socio-political narratives, and capitalistic operations, advocates and scholars encourage the critical reading of participants' own media-infused worlds (Kellner & Share, 2005).

The pluralization of the word 'literacies' is a deliberate move to broaden the concept of literacy to include multiple semiotic systems and reaffirm different pathways to learning. By recognizing students' engagement with cultural, digital, and technological literacies, educators perceive students as expert users and producers of media (Buckingham, 2007). At the same time, students are equipped with the skills to resist media manipulation, produce counter-narratives of engaged learners, and partake in authentic learning opportunities (Kellner, 1995; McLaren, 2003; Morrell, 2008).

This term also acknowledges the increasingly diverse identities, cultures, and forms of knowledge in today's schools (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). By recognizing the multiliteracies and multimodalities students bring into the classroom, they become refigured as knowledge-holders who contribute more directly to the circulation of knowledge (New London Group, 1996). Kellner and Share (2005) have noted that students who develop faculties with digital technologies also participate in critical readings of cultural artifacts, and thus, they are able to better discriminate between competing sources of purported facts.

It is important for youth to conceptualize language as perpetuating different kinds of ideologies. As Gee has explained, viewpoints are "connected to negotiable, changeable, and sometimes contested stories, histories, knowledge, beliefs, and values encapsulated into cultural models (theories) about the world" (Gee, 2008, 29). Thus, semiotic meanings are in constant flux due to individual

interests, community dynamics, and sociohistorical contexts. By developing critical stances, students learn to distinguish between authentic narratives, purported truths, and discursive ambiguities.

Ultimately, critical media literacies help nurture creative thinking, enhance students' personal media practices, and engender sustained change in local communities. In today's media-saturated world, students are highly active in digital and media spaces, and it is the responsibility of educational institutions to leverage their capacities with these tools in classrooms. Schools will want to equip students with not only academic proficiencies but also the confidence to recast existing media narratives and critique hegemonic ideologies. Within a critical media literacies framework, reading is a collective transaction, learning is a generative act, and political engagement is an actualizable achievement.

This paper provides an overview of studies that have explored the possibilities of critical media pedagogies in youth spaces. The following sections chart three major ways in which students engage with critical media literacies: by (1) affording the production of meaningful and authentic autoethnographies, (2) facilitating hospitable connections with near and distant others, and (3) encouraging powerful self-constructions of social identities within virtual communities.

Giving Voice to the Self, the Other, and the Virtual

Several scholars have commented on the necessity for more diverse voices and indigenous wisdom in academic spaces. Whereas white male English-speaking authors have been long-celebrated in schools, voices of youth and marginalized narratives in particular have been traditionally undervalued. Many schools still prioritize the Arnoldian canon and distribute primarily the works of mainstream authors (Mayher, 1990; Graff, 2008). However, within a critical media literacies framework, students participate in writing processes to read and write their own worlds (Freire, 1970).

Schools that sense an urgency to move away from "Old Masters" (Spivak, 1990, p. 785) and want to offer a more varied "literary diet" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 204) may want to encourage the dissemination of student-produced works. In keeping with this goal, instructional redesign with a critical media literacies framework involves narratives that come directly from the learners themselves and that draw from their diverse backgrounds.

The concept of critical media literacies inspires educators to reconsider what it means to be knowledge-holders in society and to value the forms of literacy possessed by students. Black feminist writers such as Patricia Hill Collins and Gloria Ladson-Billings have expressed that strong textual analysis involves the interrogation of difference and celebrates definitive contributions of historically underserved members of society (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

When schools meaningfully teach more works by youth—who often represent voices from underrecognized segments such as communities of color, LGBTQ writers, and immigrants—they are able to launch "a brand-new subject, alive, with defamilialization" (Cixous, 1976, 890). The texts that students then

write and respond to, both in-person and online, can better reflect their own social realities. As educators more carefully attend to the multiliteracies of students, they orient curricula to actual lived experiences and personal capacities rather than impose irrelevant standards.

This literature review examines several studies that attest to the ways critical media literacies encourage students to see themselves as productive agents with the power to act on their social worlds. In this paper, I focus on three major thematic strands that emerge from the field of critical media literacies: autoethnographies, cross-cultural communities, and virtual realities.

Autoethnographies encourage compelling multimedia interrogations of self and community. There exists a long-held practice of constructing and sharing autobiographical narratives, but often such studies have been framed as critical analyses rather than forms of critical media literacies (Camangian, 2010; Alexander, 2005; Carey-Webb, 2001). The deliberate integration of various multimedia and digital tools in self-inscription projects amplifies students' voices, allows them to understand their own social identities, and helps them foster a sharper criticality, as articulated in the studies below.

Cross-cultural communities afford hospitable engagements with other self-constituting subjects in online environments. This section builds on the history of sociocultural theory, especially in terms of how interpersonal play and social learning contribute to the development of youth (Vygotsky, 1967). In addition, the notion of interpretive communities, or groups of individuals who come together as collective readers, accentuates the importance of intellectual discoveries made through productive dialogue with others (Fish, 1980). The understanding that students benefit from communal exchanges is evident, but the outlined studies will go further by highlighting ways in which critical media literacies enhance cross-cultural connections in digital platforms and online environments.

Finally, virtual realities allow for the constitution of alternative identities in user-constructed digital worlds. Several recent studies have identified how virtual worlds enhance technical skills such as language learning, spatial navigation, and writing proficiencies (Lin & Yan, 2015; Stockrocki, 2013; Xu, et al., 2011). This paper, however, additionally emphasizes research that has explored how virtual identities engender greater engagement with civic issues, foster confidence with nonstandard dialect use, and promote youth as architects of social worlds.

Inscribing the World through Autoethnographies

By engaging with critical media literacies, students participate in collaborative learning communities through in-person and digital spaces while acquiring wide-ranging abilities (Jenkins, et al., 2008). Participation in media production allows for the creation and distribution of student content such as podcasts, blogs, videos, radio shows, apps, digital stories, wikis, and other multimodal artifacts. By employing critical media literacies, individuals have the ability to present counternarratives that interrupt and dismantle traditional conceptions of marginalized groups as apathetic, underperforming, or reluctant to

achieve. Given the freedom to experiment with different modes and generate a range of personalized content, learners are able to explore multiple narrative possibilities and gain recognition as visionary artists.

Within a critical media literacies framework, students are granted opportunities to craft alternative narratives that represent their complex identities. For example, Althea Nixon's (2013) research has highlighted collaborative digital storytelling projects by Latino, African American, and Pacific Islander children in an urban, after-school club in Southern California. These students wrote autoethnographic pieces and engaged in "critical dialogue around issues of race, ethnicity, and gender" (Nixon, et al., 2013, 127).

Through these digital projects, students were able to explore concepts of transnationalism, diverse cultural practices, and identity politics. They were specifically able to engage in dialogues about power dynamics and to become more critical of the social forces that informed systemic racism and everyday prejudice. By not only interrogating their own lives but also situating their narratives within larger social contexts, students developed a sophisticated vocabulary to address structural inequities, systemic realities, and global issues.

In his study of a two-summer writing course, Ted Hall (2011) examined digital literacy practices of African-American youth who became knowledge producers through counterhegemonic discursive practices. Citing the writing of Henry Louis Gates, Hall noted that students have a "need and right to contest the unifying force of hegemonic discourse" (Hall, 2011, 11). Drawing from autobiographical stories, these narrators participated in relevant conversations around acts of social justice and contested positivistic research that had once positioned the scientific analyst as the only authorized observer.

The students' own stories affirmed their authentic identities and community affinities, not only as they developed aesthetic and rhetorical skills but also as they focused on pertinent sociopolitical issues. Classrooms became liberating spaces that promoted multiple positionalities for "not only reading the word and world through a dialect lens, but also reimagining epistemologies" (Hall, 2011, 17). Individuals were able to interpret their social worlds and weave their own stories into resonating personal narratives. Inscribing their own stories and understanding others' testimonies brought into relief the possibility of living multiple realities and engaging in numerous ways of being.

Finally, in his inquiry into 9th graders' interactions with mobile games, Antero Garcia (2013) highlighted the promise of media-based autoethnographies. In writing about their own communities, students acquired a more critical lens when closely examining their distinct social habitats. Students participated in a three-step process of 1) informing: gathering information about their societies with digital tools 2) performing: producing new works and 3) transforming: impacting the world. Participating in autoethnographic practices through co-generated scavenger hunts and Wikipedia entries about their school, for instance, helped them develop "transformative, empowering voice[s]" in order to not only read the wor(l)d but also engage in the "process of *writing* the world" (Garcia, 2013, 122, emphasis in the original).

These acts of indigenous ethnography pushed the boundaries of traditional academic learning and allowed them to construct new narratives about their own social environments. Such activities enhance students' understanding of their unique social contexts and bridge personal aptitudes with academic abilities. By impacting the research landscape through data collection, performing narratives through media production, and transforming their own social worlds with their findings, students are empowered to think in new, generative ways.

Autoethnographies help engender productive cultural investigations and epistemological reimaginings of local communities as sites of narrative possibilities. By engaging with critical media literacies, youth are able to subvert notions of learners as powerless receptacles (Freire, 1970). This radical rethinking of students as informers, performers, and agents reaffirms the significance of their personal interests, social environments, and lived experiences.

Cross-Cultural Cosmopolitan Interactions in Digital Spaces

In James Gee's view, affinity spaces are sustained by informal learning cultures, whose members exchange ideas about shared passions in knowledge domains that had once been exclusively reserved for experts (Gee & Hayes, 2011). Learning within these settings tend to be organic, mediated by mutual interests, and informed by the use of meaningful symbols (Gee, 2004). These associations are typically activated through robust social arrangements and are distinguished their participants' shared passions and lexicons.

Through the constant interchange of ideas, students continue to reshape their understandings of self and others through a recursive learning process. This pedagogy builds on previous notions of participatory "osmosis" (Mayher, 1990, 90), situated learning (Lave & Wegner, 1991), interaction (Delpit, 2006), and the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1962). Critical media literacies encourage students with common interests not just to absorb information from peers but also to utilize their cultural knowledge to foster productive collaborations. Partnerships, debates, and multilayered interactions take place, and by navigating multiple platforms, students develop an understanding of how to translate social identities to digital spaces and interact ethically with others across diverse environments. Within multimodal learning communities, students use personal fluencies with media and technology in order to produce, disseminate, and respond to varied content.

The development of critical media literacies fosters engagement across multiple communities, which reduce the distance between student designers and global audiences. Anna Smith and Glynda Hull (2003) have found that student authors and readers have been able to reach audiences that were "previously unimagined and out of reach," with "the capacity to respond directly, becoming genuine interlocutors" (Smith & Hull, 2003, 64). This investigation revealed that by discussing videos on blog posts and sharing digital stories from different parts of the world, youth enhanced their understandings of different cultures and demonstrated genuine interest in connecting with others.

Synchronous and asynchronous interactions across diverse communities help advance globalized discourse and cosmopolitan hospitality. This ontological

positioning expands students' intellectual curiosity and fosters their ability to show care and generosity of spirit. With the rise in incidents involving online harassment and other disturbing acts of bullying, students benefit when they are nurtured to conduct themselves in a compassionate manner. By participating in discursive exchanges in online forums and digital platforms with empathy, learners become more sensitive to perspectives that are distinct from their own.

Thoughtful planning, radical love, genuine care, and anti-racist pedagogies drive education to generate more critical readings of the wor(l)d, creative productions of counterhegemonic texts, and inspirational civic participation in youth (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2005; Delpit, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gay, 2010). In 2015, Robyn Seglem and Antero Garcia conducted an inquiry into the affordances of social media interactions between sixteen preservice teachers in online conferences, Skype and Today'sMeet channels, discussion forums, and blog posts. While learning how to construct culturally relevant curricula for diverse students, these instructors made discoveries about the power of discourse and inspected their own socially constructed identities through "positionality, authoring, and world making" (Seglem & Garcia, 2015, 7). Like Smith and Hull's research, this study found that digital connections cultivated sympathetic and receptive dispositions.

As instructors learn about youth cultures across different contexts, they increasingly recognize media and digital artifacts that populate students' social worlds, and they are able to shift their own curricula and language use to become more culturally responsive (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2002). Therefore, teachers who want to remain committed to socially just pedagogies may want to pay close attention to the literacy practices in which their students engage on a daily basis. It is important to listen to how students make sense of the world and to build learning environments that invite youth to utilize their capacities. By gaining insights into the social platforms and digital practices that interest their students, teachers can guide youth to understand important disciplinary and social issues through the aid of familiar media and digital tools.

Lastly, in their analysis of a "pedagogy of play," Vasudevan, DeJaynes, and Schmier (2013) have found that critical media literacies activate complex identity constructions and raise relevant social issues. Through research conducted at a high school in Brooklyn, New York, they found that students' blogs touched on concerns and ideas such as academic stresses, financial difficulties, graduation prospects, friendships and dating, national politics, hobbies, and short fiction. The researchers also discovered that students connected directly with their "trusted readers," who gained insights into writers' emotional stressors and could respond to dilemmas with empathy (Vasudevan, et al., 2013, 30).

Student-produced texts in online communities allow for deeper understandings of individuals' multi-dimensional lives, and teacher-mentors who take the time to offer comments recognize them as whole individuals. If educators value students as full and complex beings, youth are more likely to see themselves as agents of change who have the capacity to shape their own social futures.

Cross-cultural interchanges fundamentally alter social contracts, expand hospitable stances, and help students build “thick” or robust relationships (Moll, et al., 1992). While it is still important to recognize the importance of face-to-face collaborations, social media settings are productive spaces in which youth participants contribute, circulate, and respond to others. Digital learning environments are thereby able to solidify learners’ aptitudes as imaginative writers and considerate readers.

Civic and Social Engagement in Virtual Environments

A final manner in which critical media literacies play a role in the lives of learners pertains to the establishment of multiple identities in fictional settings. This idea is not new, particularly in the field of literary criticism. Umberto Eco (1995) famously wrote about the existence of numerous reading identities, as a so-called “empirical reader” traverses various textual paths, which may diverge based on distinct personal emotions, situational contexts, and spontaneous choices.

This concept of narrative refraction reinforces the idea that there are multiple ways of seeing, feeling, and being in the world. These pathways can occur even within the same body, for by inhabiting an imagined universe, an individual may have two distinct reading experiences, for instance, when she first experiences a text at the age of fifteen and then when she revisits the same work at sixty. The accumulation of proficiencies, gaps left by forgotten memories, and select resonances of recent occurrences render the latter reading experience as unique—though not entirely divorced—from the former.

In this spirit, scholars have continued to examine the multiplicity of identities that readers and writers adopt. With the advent of virtual worlds, research has delved into the implications of inhabiting distinct selves that are reified across digital spaces. When reconstructing the self in virtual environments, users engineer semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical narratives that build on personal themes or ideas, then develop them through various social and contextual stimuli. The studies below demonstrate how youth become empowered through the creation of virtual identities and become active agents, world-builders, and socially conscious allies.

In his examination of avatars in online spaces, Rafi Santo (2013) has noted that participation in three-dimensional virtual worlds such as Second Life ignited the agentive potential of users. Within expansive online environments whose structures are determined by their users, players create alternative identities, adopt different appearances, and “engage in acts of self-determinism” (Santo, 2013, 213). For instance, one teenager mobilized public debates about age-based separations in Second Life and published a 20-page document titled “The Grid Unification Proposal.” In it, he protested age discrimination and argued for a creative common space in which both teens and adults could interact and learn from one another; its creators later established a more integrated configuration of shared environments in this virtual world.

Such cases demonstrate how passionate youth can use their voices to have a considerable impact on the physical world. The creation of virtual identities

advances the development of technical skills such as modeling, scripting, and entrepreneurship, but it also affords personal agency and synergy with others in a distinctive social ecology. Although virtual identities exist only in online spaces, students develop the capacity to experiment, network, and innovate just as they would in physical environments. With proper support, virtual exchanges thus help youth build social-emotional competencies, and the freedom to play within open virtual environments cultivates risk-taking, ingenuity, and initiative.

Moreover, Rebecca Black's (2007) examination of the website www.fanfiction.net revealed that interactive virtual platforms legitimize young writers as storytellers with powerful alternative identities. In her investigation of English Language Learners' (ELL) use of fan fiction stories, Black found that students drew from their knowledge of popular culture and produced creative short fiction that built on the worlds of established anime characters. One writer, for instance, published pieces that integrated Western artistic elements, such as references to popular music, with traditional Japanese animation tropes. In doing so, this writer successfully participated in meaningful cultural reconstructions and also reconfigured her own identity as an authority of fan fiction. In spite of the presence of conventional errors or spelling typos, devoted readers continued to ask for updates from this exceptional author.

Such learning experiences enhance disciplinary literacies in low-stakes virtual environments, rather than burdening students with the task of finding answers determined by test makers, applying standardized grammar, or conforming to conventional writing styles. By crafting virtual identities, students create narratives of personal interest, receive acknowledgement from online followers, and become more confident inventors of elaborate fictional worlds.

Lastly, in an extensive review of critical media literacies in digital spaces, Margaret Haddix, Antero Garcia, and Detra Price-Dennis (2016) inspected the effects of identity construction in virtual worlds of fan fiction and other multimodal spaces. By creating digital narratives and other media products, youth contested traditional representations of marginalized groups and raised their "sense of agency and activism and desire to be civically engaged with real issues in the world" (Haddix, et al., 2016, 26). Students' reformulations of identity constructions in virtual spaces encouraged them to use their multiliteracies in order to challenge mainstream narratives and become active members of social causes.

This point about civic engagement brings the focus back to Rafi Santo (2013), who has outlined three stages of critical media literacy movements:

- (1) *Critical literacy*: At first, young people were engaged in critical practices that encouraged the explicit questioning of media's biases.
- (2) *Participatory literacy*: In the second wave, youth participated in larger social cultures that incorporated media literacies.
- (3) *Hacker literacies*: In the third wave, individuals felt empowered through acts of criticality and participation in order to alter societal conditions.

This third and most important framework, which Santo has advocated strongly, asserts that students reconstruct their social worlds to better reflect their own sociopolitical values. Rather than being perceived as passive consumers of media, they become engaged in political activism as critically literate citizens. Similarly, Antero Garcia (2013) has argued for increased civic engagement and participatory media practices to connect youth culture to larger communities. Indeed, once personal media literacy practices are recognized and encouraged by educators, schools then make more space for students' contributions to curricular conversations. Empowered youth can then join active social communities, question prevailing assumptions, and disrupt damaging narratives or stereotypes.

Gramsci (1971) has argued that cultural hegemony does not need to impose ideologies by force because of the unconscious absorption of dominant values. Through the proliferation of cultural norms, standardized discourses and damaging stereotypes often become circulated and reified as lived phenomena. Thus, it is critical to contest pervasive conceptions of underperforming students with alternative student-produced narratives (Kellner, 1995). As demonstrated by these studies, the construction of virtual identities open multiple entry points for greater self-efficacy, student empowerment, and compelling counternarratives. Somewhat paradoxically, virtual environments help students become active agents in the physical world. Rather than offering simply an escape from reality, online identities lead to actual civic and social achievements in larger communities.

Implications for the Future of Critical Media Literacy Studies

While media and digital technologies have the potential to empower students, it is important for schools to be intentional about their inclusion of critical media literacies. There are inherent risks and limitations of any pedagogical framework, and if liberatory projects are left unchecked, new regimes may harden "into a dominating 'bureaucracy'" (Freire, 1970, 57). There is a likelihood for any movement to transform into what Spivak (1990) deems a new orientalism, particularly if it neither acknowledges the complexities of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1980) nor stimulates an activist mindset.

Therefore, critical media literacies cannot be seen as a panacea. Researchers have noted that the successful realization of progressive pedagogies may be hindered by "overly idealistic and theoretical" thinking (Ravitch, 2000, as cited in Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, 47) as well as concerns about privacy and exploitation (Santo, 2013). Ineffective implementations are sometimes also aggravated by a lack of funding, limited professional development, and an overemphasis on measurable skill attainments (Hagood, 2013). Effective implementation of critical media literacies involves financial, structural, and ideological support to revolutionize pedagogy in a contemporary era.

In addition, critical media literacies may include aspects of popular culture and students' personal interests, but significant scrutiny of a "corporate culture industry" or propagations of stereotypes is necessary (Haddix, et al., 2016, 23). Some schools may also problematically perpetuate a false dichotomy between elite and base media (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, 54). Therefore, students

who develop criticality are better prepared to dispute the lowbrow status of some media artifacts deemed unworthy of academic attention.

Moreover, while critical media literacies may facilitate the productive capacities of students, participants benefit from a continual reexamination of their practices – or run the risk of unconsciously reproducing dominant discourses (Schmier, 2013, 28). Similarly, in an attempt to integrate diverse and eclectic narratives, it is crucial not to trivialize ethnic traditions or to negate deep and complicated sociocultural histories (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, 61). Specific examples of critical media literacies' limitations include instances in which students have been involved in digital literacy practices but have failed to produce critical deconstructions of authoritative texts (Lewis, 2013) or when they have neglected to address the implications of power dynamics in classrooms (Schmier, 2013).

Through progressive 21st century models of learning, students are positioned for success when multimodal aptitudes are recognized and when schools deploy critical media literacies intentionally and strategically. Such applications of critical media literacies not only enhance students' aptitude with technical skills but allow for enhanced awareness of self and community. Just as traditional print literature has the power to equip students with the capacity to deconstruct language and gain a broader awareness of the world, critical media literacies accommodate more robust opportunities for self-actualization, ethical demeanors across digital domains, and greater social consciousness through the construction of virtual worlds.

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