

CRITICAL MEDIA EDUCATION:
YOUTH MEDIA PRODUCTION
AS A SPACE OF CREATIVITY
FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

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By
Artin Lahiji

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a theoretically based critical analysis that aims to explore the effects of media on young people and provide a deeper understanding of the processes of media education associated with critical thinking, creativity, and identity formation through active engagement of youth in digital media production. This critical analysis is informed by the insights from critical social theory (including Frankfurt School's critical theory and postmodernist thought), and a Whiteheadian perspective in process philosophy for lifelong learning.

This research explores the argument towards different views from different assumptions about media effects on young viewers and alternative approaches to media education. This thesis offers a basis upon which to synthesize positive insights from all current media pedagogical approaches into a more cohesive, critical, exploratory, and creative practices of media education. It can potentially offer possibilities in developing critical thinking, critical creativity, and a sense of fulfillment for lifelong learning. The synthesis of this thesis is towards rethinking the creativity as having a vital role in lifelong learning through the creative process of youth media production.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Statement

This chapter is a personal introduction to my research thesis that reflects my background, purpose and goals, research questions, delimitations, and summary of this study. As media and communication become central to society, it is imperative to develop the skills and abilities required for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating messages in a variety of contexts. My interest is especially to consider the implication of how critical pedagogical theory and other progressive educational theories can be translated into effective media educational practices.

Ever since my undergraduate studies in the New Media program I have been deeply affected by the undeniable effect of mass media on young people. I have believed that we can positively influence on the direction of this impact if we teach young people the ethical and practical aspects of media in order to develop their critical thinking skills and give them a means of creative self-expression, then we can work together to build stronger communities and a healthier society. Looking back on my undergraduate studies, I realize now that I believed in the constructivist approach to teaching and learning long before I heard the term. As a media educator and the founder of Youth Media Workshop (YMW), I have been working with youth from aboriginal and immigrant communities as well as providing after-school media programs in elementary and high schools in Saskatoon. It has always been clear to me that practice-based approach with hands-on experiences provides an ideal educational environment for students to construct their own

meaning from their life experiences that results in deeper understanding and nurtures a love and passion for lifelong learning.

Although media education in Saskatchewan is lacking in the school curriculum, the YMW has developed various modes of practice in Saskatoon's communities and schools in the form of after-school programs. My experience in directing and teaching media at the YMW has led me to develop an interest in investigating the impact that participation in a media education program has on a core group of youth participants.

1.2 Problem Statement

I am interested in exploring and developing a framework that will enable me to observe and understand how youth experiences in different stages of media production can help youth to become engaged as active producers of knowledge and insights in a world where youth are more likely to be influenced towards consumption of products, images, and identities constructed by others rather than questioning the very necessity of them. Research in the field of media literacy, while extensive, has been mostly in the area of access. Media education still remains marginal in the school curriculum that needs to be recognized, supported, practiced, and enhanced. There has been relatively limited published scholarly research on how young people analyze, evaluate, and create media production towards rethinking the creativity as having a vital role in lifelong learning through youth media production in a creative process of critical media pedagogy.

1.3 Research Questions

In developing a framework to understand critical media production for youth, this thesis is guided by the following questions: How do young people move from being consumers to being producers of media? How can their passive knowledge become

activated through a creative process of media production? What is the relationship between media education, critical creativity, and creative practice of youth in media production? How does creative practice relate to and reference everyday life, and how are social identities formed around the engagement of youth in active process of creativity in media production practices?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This research is a theoretically based critical analysis that aims to explore the effects of media on young people and provide a deeper understanding of the processes of media education associated with critical thinking, creativity, and identity formation through active engagement of youth in digital media production. This critical analysis is informed by the insights from critical social theory (including Frankfurt School's critical theory and postmodernist thought), and a Whiteheadian perspective in process philosophy for lifelong learning. Critical social theory is a multidisciplinary knowledge base with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge. It approaches this goal by promoting the role of criticism in the search for quality education.

In this study, I have explored the effects of media on youth as well as media education as an alternative to alleviate passive and uncritical consumption of media such as television, the internet, and computer games among youth. Media education seeks to encourage critical thinking and creative producing of meanings in the mind of students while responding to their curiosity and adventures of discovery in collaborative and exploratory practices of media productions. I have studied the literature on critical pedagogical theory that developed through the Frankfurt School and has evolved through

postmodern influences and the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Douglas Kellner, and other contemporary scholars.

I have explored the argument towards different views from different assumptions about media effects on young viewers and alternative approaches to media education. Generally, there are two major views in media literacy movement, one view sees the agenda of media literacy as empowering individuals to explore and to control the effects of media on themselves. Another view sees the agenda of media literacy as transforming society through activist work where individuals are motivated to change institutions to make them more democratic (Christ and Potter, 1998). My thesis offers a basis upon which to synthesize positive insights from all current media pedagogical approaches into a more cohesive, critical, exploratory, and creative practices of media education that can potentially offer possibilities in developing critical thinking, critical creativity, and a sense of fulfillment for lifelong learning. The thesis works towards a synthesis which enables us to rethink the place of creativity as having a vital role in lifelong learning through youth media production in a creative process of critical media pedagogy.

This thesis does not provide detailed recommendations for media educational activities, or teaching materials that can be used in classrooms. This thesis sets out to provide a coherent conceptual framework and an understanding of the dynamics of creativity in media educational environment.

1.5 Thesis Organization

Chapter one is a personal introduction to my research thesis that reflects my background, purpose and goals, research questions, delimitations, and summary of this study. Chapter two provides a general overview of media exposure, consumer culture,

and their effects in the youth population, the media literacy movement, and several media pedagogical approaches. In chapter three, critical media pedagogy is discussed as an educational process and integral foundation to acquiring media literacy, critical thinking, critical creativity and a sense of fulfillment providing an analytical framework that will offer both theoretical and practical guidance. Chapter four focuses on creativity as an active process and situates critical media studies as a creative approach to lifelong learning. It explores the significance of media in the creative choice of expression and discusses a perspective of media in the creative process. In chapter five, the implications and conclusions of current research, including a future research proposal, are discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF MEDIA EFFECTS AND MEDIA EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of media exposure, stereotyping, violence, consumer culture, and their effects in the youth population, the media literacy movement, and several media pedagogical approaches. This chapter also addresses the need for media education and explores media production as a key element of media education.

2.2 Media Exposure and Stereotyping

The mass media have a powerful ability to reach a wide audience with influential messages that establishes strong social and cultural impact upon our society. Marshall McLuhan (1967) uses the term “the medium is the message” as a means of explaining how the distribution of the message can often be more important than the message itself.

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by the global communications expansion of media and visual culture, radically altering the dissemination and production of information and knowledge. Education, widely espoused as the principal instrument of social change, was fundamentally challenged and transfigured by this process (Goldfarb, 2002). According to Neil Postman, in our society, the aim of education and the values and importance of learning have been distorted (Postman, 1995). Postman believes that the great stories (“gods”) of democracy have been replaced by new narratives which represent a new conception of education with reliance on economic productivity (getting a good paying job), consumerism (consuming and accumulating commodity), and technology (mechanical solutions, not critical

judgment). Postman notes that he is not against the use of technology in schools but rather, he argues against our sleepwalking attitudes toward it, allowing it to distract us from more important things, as well as making a god of it.

As a media production teacher working with youth, my experiences have confirmed the literature that states how young people are often the subjects of contradictory perceptions in our society. Youth are considered the hope for our society's future, yet are often blamed for many of our social problems. Henry Giroux (1996) investigates the impact on youth of the violence influenced by media culture such as Quentin Tarantino's films and talk radio. He also discusses racism in the portrayal of Black youth in Hollywood films and the pedagogy of Disney's animated films (Giroux, 1996). Giroux argues that youth are being increasingly subjected to racial stereotyping, aggression and violence in our cultures. He believes that today's youth are a reminder of a generation's failure to solve society's problems. Our culture considers youth as a kind of enemy, who embody drug abuse and generates their own poverty. As a result our society labels our youth as "Generation X" and slackers (Giroux, 1996). Generation X is a term used to describe generations following the Baby Boomers raised in the 1970s and 1980s. Douglas Coupland used the term "Generation X" in his fictional book written in 1991, which is about three characters that are described as underemployed, overeducated, intensely private and unpredictable (Coupland, 1991). Generation X drew media attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s, gaining a stereotypical reputation as cynical, hopeless, frustrated and unmotivated slackers.

Stereotyping can portray entire groups of people from a single and simplistic point of view. It distorts pictures of reality and disrespects individuality and human

dignity. When stereotypes or prejudice persist in light of counter evidence, it creates major problems in the form of increased prejudice, discrimination and refusal of imagination involved in the denial of subjectivity in society. In the history, Nazi propaganda, for example, reinforced a negative stereotype against Jewish people that pictured Jews as certain “type”, not as valued individuals and citizens. Negative stereotypes generate negative perception and interpretation about certain social groups (Sherman, 1996) and are directly connected with prejudice and discrimination.

According to Henderson and Baldasty (2003), people of colour obviously have been marginalized in television commercials through stereotypical portrayals. Henderson and Baldasty interestingly found that African American usually are portrayed in stereotypical roles in athletic shoe or fast food commercials, while White people are usually portrayed in responsible roles in affluent commercials for automobile and household products (Henderson & Baldasty, 2003). The research showed that racial stereotypes portrayed in the television programs could play a major role in people’s perceptions of media content to the extent of supporting racial stereotypes (Gorham, 1999).

We live in a world that the social, political, and economic power domination denies subjectivity, the generative concepts of creativity, aesthetics, imagination, and self-expression are ignored and most human relations are manipulative and insincere. People have become conditioned to accept the world as those in power see it. This conception of social conditioning is resonant with Foucault’s conception of power as circulating and functioning in the form of chains through organizations that use individuals as the vehicles of power (Foucault, 1980).

2.3 Youth, Media, and Violence

Youth engagement in aggressive behaviour can find its roots in the complexity of many problems such as violence in the media, abuse, gangs, weapons, poverty, poor family environment, peer pressure, bad neighborhoods, unemployment, intolerance, and ignorance. With a lack of awareness, lack of solidarity, misunderstanding of democracy and human rights, and the indifference of oppressed people to their situation, people become accustomed to their daily world of false values, ego-gratification, and violence.

A Global Study on Media Violence by UNESCO states that television has become a major socialization factor which dominates the lives of children in urban and rural areas around the globe (Grobel, 1998). Many children spend more time watching television than they spend learning in school or talking to their parents. They view glamorized fictional violent characters on television and try to imitate and perform their actions in real life (Potter, 2000). With the rising concerns about violence in our society, violence on television has set off a new round of debate on the effect of television violence on children and young people, which has been raging since the first black and white television entered homes (Potter, 2000).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the use of guns in western movies became the main way of expressing aggression and violence. Changing characters from cowboys to gangsters, the guns became machine guns and the victims died more violently when, in the 1970s and 1980s, automatic weapons got into the action portraying horrifying violent scenes with colour graphics. Mass-produced feature films for television brought high-tech violence with frightening scenes into people's living rooms. By this point, the murder

rate in the real world was rapidly increasing and television violence was being criticized more seriously (Gunter and McAleer, 1990).

Those from the Frankfurt School were among the first social theorists to perceive the importance of the media in the reproduction of contemporary societies. In their view, the media stand in the center of leisure activity as important agents of socialization and mediators of political reality, and should thus be seen as major institutions of contemporary societies with a variety of economic, political, cultural and social effects (Kellner, 2003). Kellner notes that the media are also perceived as a social problem for the Frankfurt School in that they produce a mass society that undermines individuality, democracy, and the salutary aspects of high culture. According to him, the classical view of Adorno and Horkheimer on the media and morality was that the media were purveyors of bourgeois and capitalist values that promoted the dominant ideology, constructing viewers as passive consumers of dominant norms and consumer behavior. Kellner also argues that Adorno and Horkheimer's model of the cultural industries, the standardized formats of mass-produced media genres, imposed predictable experiences on audiences and helped produce a homogenized mass consciousness and society.

Habermas (1962) states that the function of the media has been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere into shaping, constructing, and limiting public discourse to those themes validated and approved by media corporations. Hence, the interconnection between a sphere of public debate and individual participation has been fractured and transmuted into a realm of political information and spectacle, in which citizen-consumers ingest and passively absorb entertainment and information. "Citizens" thus become spectators of media presentations

and discourse that mold public opinion, reducing consumer/citizens to objects of news, information, and political manipulation.

Every year an average person watches over 21,000 TV advertisements which all carry a similar message, “Buy Something, Do It Now” (Korten, 1995), thus leading many children and young people to find that “what’s cool” is often more attractive than what is important. According to Korten, aggressive behavior is related to the total amount of television watched, not only to the amount of violent television watched. Aggressive behavior can also be stimulated by frenetic, hectic programming that creates a high level of arousal in children (Eron and Huesmann, 1986). Research has shown that passive and uncritical viewing of violence on television can increase aggression, may lead to decrease sensitivity to the pain and suffering of others, increase tolerance towards violence, and produce a view of the world as a fearful place (Murray, 2001). According to Social Learning Theory, many causes of aggression are social. Aggression can be produced through the imitation of aggressive models, either in face-to-face situations or by viewing violence in films or on TV (Bandura, 1973).

Extensive research has been conducted on the effect of violent television programming on children’s behavior. Leonard Eron (1986) studied the long term effects of television viewing on children. In 1960, Eron began to study 875 children to determine why some of them were more aggressive than others. Eron followed their development over a course of 22 years. He found that television violence played a significant role on stimulating children’s aggressive behaviours. A study conducted by Eron and his colleagues in 1960 in Columbia County, New York showed that the amount of violence youngsters watched on television at age 8 is related to their aggressiveness. In follow up

studies, he found that the seriousness of criminal acts at age thirty was related to the amount of violence watched when those perpetuating the acts were younger. These relations hold up even when initial aggressiveness, IQ, and social class are statistically controlled (Eron, 1999). James Hamilton (2000) came to the same conclusions indicating the influence of television violence on children. Social science research, in general, indicates that violent images are more likely to be imitated if they go unpunished, show little pain or suffering, and involve attractive perpetrators, which describes a large portion of the types of violence used on television (Hamilton, 2000). Wendy Josephson (1995) notes that children who create violent or heroically aggressive fantasies and who identify with aggressive heroes are the ones most likely to be affected by violent television because these fantasies serve as rehearsals for violent responses to real-life events.

In a research paper titled “The Role of Fantasies and Dreams in the TV Viewing-Aggression Relationship”, Viemero and Paajanen (1992) investigate the role of fantasies and dreams in the TV viewed by children and their relationship with aggression. They generally argue that watching violence on TV programs tends to increase violence in viewers. They mention some effects such as perceived realism of TV, identification with TV characters, social class and former aggression levels. The researchers were able to explain a phenomenon that was descriptive, predictable and potentially reversible in the context of educational programs for improvement. They selected 391 subjects, boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 10, from music-oriented and regular oriented classes. Their research found a significant correlation between TV viewing variables and aggression as well as significant positive correlation between the amount of TV and TV violence viewed and fear and aggressive fantasies. These relationships were found more

often in boys than girls, more frequently in older kids, and more in children in regular oriented classes than music-oriented classes. Thus, the research suggests that fantasies can mediate between TV viewing and violence viewing which subsequently cause aggressive behaviors.

Viemero and Paajanen believe that the later study supports the information-processing theory, which suggests that the more children watch TV the more they generate fantasies about the programs and rehearse the scenes viewed which, in turn, cause explicit aggressive behaviors. They claim that the information-processing model can explain the relationship among fantasies, violence viewing, and aggression. The information-processing model suggests that aggressive children adopt aggressive scripts early in life to guide behavior. These scripts live within children's memory, persist into adulthood and are maintained through observational and learning processes. The scripts can be encoded, rehearsed, stored, retrieved and performed due to the activation of memory or some relevant cues. The research claims that rehearsal would increase the likelihood of the script being recalled later and it can be practiced through fantasizing about images seen on TV.

Although the information-processing model seems to help in our understanding of how children take in, represent, store, and recall information and explains the positive relationships of TV viewing and violence viewing with aggression, it does not fully explain children's behavior and is limited in the consideration of aggressive girls, as the focus of such studies tends to be more on physical aggressive behaviour, which is more common among boys than girls. The researchers fail to admit that young children are very difficult to assess accurately because of their periodical distraction, cultural

differences, language barriers, and inconsistent behaviour in the presence of researchers as strangers. However, despite these weaknesses, the paper strongly supports the premise that passive television watching can cause aggressive behaviours in children.

Consequently, all the above studies show that aggression is intentional action and causes harm or pain by individuals or groups to another individual or groups. Aggressive stimuli in society or any objects associated with aggressive responses, such as guns and other forms of weapons, may cause aggression. Violence in television not only leads to aggressiveness in the viewer, particularly children, but also increases the likelihood of a general acceptance of violence in society.

Through the influence of today's media, especially television, we accept that being human is to be lonely, insecure, alienated and in fear of death. The reality is that most people, including children and young people, like to watch television for hours and it moves them out of their day-to-day lives which may contain these elements of fear and pain. Often the more commercial and silly it is, the more popular it becomes. Television seduces viewers into a fantasy land of soap opera heroes, cop shows, and commercials that promise happiness and freedom from pain or loneliness if we take the right pills and eat the right cereal, drive the right car, or drink the right beverage. People are entertaining themselves to death, participating unconsciously in the lifestyles of the rich, the famous, and the violent. We are becoming passive consumers of prepackaged meanings and manipulated lifestyles.

2.4 Youth, Media, and Consumerism

In recent years, most likely due to the escalation of commercial activity targeting children and young people, there is a growing tide of anxiety about the consequences of

consumerism. If we look in closer detail at the realities of youth's consumer behaviour, we can see the role of parents, and how the negotiation around consumption occurs within families. We can see that parents are being targeted by the consumer culture even before their children are born and from that point on, parents' aspirations, their wishes, their fantasies about who their child will become are being targeted by the market. This can be seen when we look at the kind of negotiations that go on about what products should be purchased for kids. It is the parents who make decisions to buy the products for youth to consume and, in a sense, make youth consumers or allow them to be consumers. At the same time, it is also the parents who are being confused, feel anxious and guilty if they do not purchase products that they feel are not necessary for their children to consume.

Many media literacy advocates argue that media has the power to influence the way children and adults think about themselves and the world around them. Increasingly, youth identify themselves within market constructed stereotypes and modes of behavior that influence their life style such as fashion, hairstyle, artistic tastes, and social interaction. Kellner (2001) argues that commercial interests have targeted youth as consumers. Habermas (1962) and Giroux (1997) believe these interests have been driving youth away from the public sphere, active democratic citizenship, and free thought through the process of manipulation of identities and replication of commercial models and ideals. Through these manipulative plans and prescribed identities, youth virtually have little or no time to critically engage the world, creatively explore their own lived experiences, and have the opportunity to develop moral, social, and spiritual awareness. Consequently, it appears essential to explore the positive potentials of media

education as a method to counteract the negative effects of media and provide an environment where youth can critically reflect on the underlying messages and representations of media in popular culture and make informed decisions about media viewing and producing.

Media education is increasingly perceived as an educational process that includes both the critical reading (critical thinking) and creative writing/production (creative thinking) aspects of thinking. Saskatchewan Education (1988) identifies the interrelations and complementary aspects of critical and creative thinking as types of thinking. “Creative thinking generally considered to be involved with the creation or generation of ideas, processes, experiences or objects; critical thinking is concerned with their evaluation” (Saskatchewan Education, 1988, p. 29). The importance of developing both critical and creative thinking is supported by critical pedagogical theory as the basis for critical media study, which shows that media production has the potential to help students explore their self-identities (Goodman, 2003).

Media education is about making young people as well as parents aware of what is going on, in a context where they inevitably have to identify their own informed choices. Cinema, television, and computer games have been around for many years and yet our youth have no opportunity to study media in schools. Media education cannot be ignored by school system but must be treated seriously as social practice (Luke, 1997). Youth have potentials and the right to study and understand how the media operate and learn the critical and production skills of media. With an increasing availability of new technologies, there are more opportunities for youth to become informed producers of

media rather than passive consumers. Media education or media literacy is about both reading and writing, not just critical understanding, but also about creative production.

2.5 Media Education

For centuries, philosophers have been arguing for the cultivation of the whole human and all five senses in education. Dewey (1916) signified human experience and promoted learning through doing. McLuhan (1965) embraced the potentials of new media education. Marcuse (1972, 1978) advocated an aesthetic education that allows us to see beyond rationality with the incorporation of sight, sound, hearing, touch, and taste into the learning process. With the expansion of media culture and evolving technological advancement, educators attempt to incorporate these new emerging realities into school system as part of the larger debate about educational reform. With the notion of “information society” in the writings of Castells (1996, 1997, 1998), Reich (1992), Drucker (1993) and Gates (1995) in the early 90s, the direction of educational reform has been debated in a broad view. Media education, in particular, has taken shape as part of this educational reform and debate for a number of years in some countries such as Canada, United States, England, and Australia. For more than a decade, some educational institutions in these countries have taken steps to incorporate forms of media education into their curriculum.

In Canada, as a response to the pervasiveness of popular culture, some provinces have included a very small form of media components throughout schooling (Pungente and O’Malley, 1999). The United States has added language on media literacy to their state standards, but little has been done to actually incorporate media and other forms of literacy into the curricula (Kubey and Baker, 1999). Australia has institutionalized some

form of media literacy incorporating issues of social justice and multiculturalism (Luke, 1999). The main form the media education movement has taken in these countries is mostly an informal educational setting that generally developed media literacy standards targeted primarily towards Kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) students (Christ and Potter, 1998). Christ (2004) and Potter (2001) suggest that media education can be extended to higher education classrooms addressing cognitive processes, media effects, and socio-cultural issues. Media education is not teaching through or with the media but as appropriately defined by Buckingham (2003), it “is the process of teaching and learning about media; media literacy is the outcome – the knowledge and skills learners require” (Buckingham, 2003, p.4). The more young people learn about media through experiencing, interpreting/analyzing and making the media production, the more media literate they become (Worsnop, 1994).

Although media literacy is claimed to be a recent development (Kubey, 1998), critical analysis of media messages can be traced back as far as the 1920s when British critic F.R. Leavis designed a curriculum to teach students critical analysis of advertisements, fictions, and political journals (Leavis and Thompson, 1933). In 1992, a National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (NLCML) in the United States laid a foundation for a media literacy movement that shares media educational resources with educators, parents, and concerned individuals and institutes. NLCML defines media literacy as the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms” (Aufderheide, 1993, p. xx). A media literate person, therefore, “can decode, evaluate, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media” (Aufderheide, 1997, p. 79). The Center for Media Literacy, however, defines media literacy in a

broader context that focuses on developing citizenship and democracy in addition to skills: "Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms--from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy" (Thoman and Jolls, 2005, p. 190).

Media literacy is an interdisciplinary concept that can be explored and developed through several different approaches. Kellner and Share (2005) investigate the various types of media educational programs operating by informal institutions. According to these authors, there are four main approaches to media literacy. The first approach is *protectionism*, influenced by a fear of media's negative effects on children. It discourages students from watching television or view any forms of media due to dangers of media manipulation. Neil Postman's (1985) *Amusing ourselves to death*, for example, insists that all children's programs have harmful effects through their focus on non-stop entertainment over content. Postman argues that television with entertaining images, one-way communication power, and absence of dialogue and social interaction devalue social discourse and transmit passive information that is destructive to learning. For Postman, there are three principles in the television's pedagogy: a lack of prerequisites (encouraging discontinuity of knowledge), a lack of complexity (encouraging laziness), and a lack of criticality and reasoning (leading to irrationality and passiveness). Postman is reluctant to consider the capability of audience for learning to deconstruct and negotiate the meaning of media messages. However, Postman's contribution to the

public discourse and media studies provoke educators into reassessing ideas and approaches on culture, mass media, and finding new alternatives for media education.

The second form of pedagogy is *media literacy education* which has found some ways into mainstream educational institutions such as The Pauline Center for Media Studies (2007) that offers media literacy education approach to explore communications issues and the culture of entertainment and information media productions. This approach sees media literacy as series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate. The organizations that deliver this kind of approach provide media literacy education in a variety of forms (music, video, Internet, advertising) while still working within a largely uncritical print literacy tradition.

The third approach is *media arts education*, which concentrates on valuing and appreciating the aesthetic qualities of media and the arts. This approach emphasizes traditional production models and vocational skills in post secondary educational settings and filmmaking workshops in film festivals that promotes creativity and self-expression through experiential and hands-on media production workshops. Students in this approach often tends to focus on production and performance and mainly develop technical skills in film and video production that are valuable for future employment in the film and television industry but lack the processes associated with critical thinking, identity formation, and creativity.

The fourth approach is *critical media literacy* that builds on positive insights from other approaches. It focuses on analyzing media culture as products of social production and struggle and teaching students to be critical of media representations and discourses. This approach also stresses the importance of teaching media literacy as a participatory

and collaborative project by learning to use media tools for self-expression and social activism (Kellner and Kahn, 2003). Critical media literacy allows youth to challenge dominant media discourse and create their own representations. It can potentially serve as an effective approach for synthesizing positive insights from the other three approaches into a more cohesive, critical, and creative practices.

All of the above approaches have different motivations that take place in different educational settings. Some approaches emphasize the process of creating media production rather than the product as an outcome. Other approaches may find the content of the production more important than the technical and creative aspects. These differences in approaches and practices in media education provide an opportunity to rethink media literacy and combine the potential innovative insights arising from different range of approaches and motivations into a method that can represent interdisciplinary nature of media education and allow for progressive media educational reforms. In particular, Youth Media Workshop (YMW) in Saskatoon, Canada is engaged in an approach that is informed from critical theory and critical media literacy and reflects the multiplicity and creativity of youth engagement in a creative space of media production. Media production as an aesthetic and creative process offers an approach to learning that allows playful engagements for exploring active learning through critical interpretations and aesthetic reflection of the creativity that creates excitement and passion, and stimulates both sense and reason and leads to synthetic learning. Critical media literacy can be grounded with a theoretical framework in critical media pedagogy as an integral foundation to acquiring media literacy, critical thinking, critical creativity

and a sense of fulfillment by opening a creative space for an awareness that promotes lifelong learning.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL MEDIA PEDAGOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter critical media pedagogy is discussed as an educational process and integral foundation to acquiring media literacy, critical thinking, critical creativity and a sense of fulfillment providing an analytical framework that will offer both theoretical and practical guidance. Critical media pedagogy and active engagement of youth in digital media production are considered as a means of artistic self-expression and effective communication that can help them develop critical creativity through the process of building and balancing analytic, synthetic, and practical abilities in youth media production.

3.2 Quest for Consciousness: Opening Up New Avenues and Challenges

Critical media education can offer a variety of avenues and challenges that help to awaken a social consciousness and allow creative action to help society make progressive social changes. Critical pedagogical theory provides a framework in which youth media literacy as an interdisciplinary concept can generate work study themes through creative process of media production that integrate several disciplines and combine insights from visual art, media, psychology, sociology, educational communications, and technology. It offers practical insights and a conceptualization of media educational environments as creative spaces for fostering certain intellectual abilities associated with creativity in interdisciplinary situations.

Learning is both an active and reflective process. The human experiences (action) and thoughts (reflection) combine to create new knowledge and develop a critical

consciousness (Freire, 1972, 1973). For Freire, critical consciousness is the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and to take action against these oppressive elements.

A current example of how media education can enable such a positive transformation is in the arena of school bullying and youth violence. According to Saskatchewan Learning's recent "Policy on Anti-Bullying" revised in March, 2005, the Government of Saskatchewan is committed to the promotion of caring and respectful schools that ensure healthy personal and social development for all students. As such, the policy addresses bullying and victimization on many levels, stating that successful anti-bullying interventions require a comprehensive strategy that focuses on all parties involved, including the bully, victim, school, students, parents and the larger community in which the bullying takes place (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). Taken from a media educational standpoint, this kind of policy could be complemented by integrating media literacy and media production workshops aimed at sociological analysis of violence in media, using a critical pedagogy framework, and the co-construction of media products by youth. Thus, in order to highlight the potential of media education in secondary education, this discussion focuses on its positive role with regards to the current government objective of assisting youth to pro-actively disengage from violent behaviour.

3.3 Subjectivity and Agency in Critical Media Pedagogy

3.3.1 Critical Media Theory

Critical pedagogical theory, developed through the influence of the Frankfurt School, has evolved through post-modern influences and the work of Paulo Freire, Henry

Giroux, Ira Shor, Douglas Kellner and other contemporary scholars and offers a framework for developing media education. This pedagogy presents revolutionary pathways for overcoming oppression and offers hope and possibility in developing human subjectivity and agency in learning and teaching environments. Freire (1972) believes that education can become a revolutionary instrument in the struggle for meaning over power relations to achieve liberation. For Freire, education as a major instrument in society either serves as oppressive or revolutionary. Education as an oppressive instrument creates domestication, dehumanization, objectification, and oppression. On the other hand, education as a revolutionary instrument can create liberation, humanization, subjectivity, and freedom.

Freire consistently links hope, dreams, consciousness, and subjectivity with liberation, humanization, agency, possibility, and praxis (Freire, 1972). Agency is the individual's capacity to make choices, to choose actions, and to implement those actions in society. Human agency leads to feeling emotions and having moral perceptions in any given situation as a result of human decision-making, which leads people to apply value judgments to the consequences of their decisions, and feel responsible for their decisions and actions. What-it-feels-like to be a subject (human agent) in a given situation is subjectivity, experienced interiority, an intrinsic capacity for feelings and experiencing a point of view which creates a dialogue between teachers and students and locates agency in both teachers and students (Freire, 1972). Freire's emphasis is on individual and collective intentionality or agency as a precondition for knowing. According to Henry Giroux (1987), this includes a view of human agency in which the production of meaning

takes place in the dialogue and interaction that mutually constitute the dialectical relationship between human subjectivities and the objective world.

Critical pedagogy signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities (Giroux, 1994). This is demonstrated, for example, by Ira Shor who adapts the ideas of Paulo Freire and offers a comprehensive theory and practice for critical pedagogy. For Shor, empowering education is a student-centered, critical, and democratic method of learning for self and social change that provides a space for dialogue among teachers, students and projects in exploring everyday themes, social issues, and academic knowledge. Through dialogue and problem posing, students become active agents of their learning (Shor, 1992).

For Kellner (1998) media literacy and media arts are two core components of critical media literacy that provide an educational environment for developing critical thinking and creative producing of media. Critical media literacy is the outcome of an educational creative process informed by critical media pedagogy. Critical media pedagogy is a theory of learning in media education that teaches students to decode media messages, and analyzes media's social implications and their effects. Media arts teach various production techniques by using media technologies for self-expression and creation that build an appreciation for the aesthetics of media (Kellner, 1998). Critical media pedagogy can provide the opportunity for young participants to exercise their subjectivity in their media productions and can confirm how their productions relate to their existing experiences of the media both as consumers and as producers. Kellner believes that critical media literacy should be a participatory, collaborative project which

begins in childhood and continues into adulthood. Those people who do gain critical media literacy awareness create new dimensions and meanings and reach new levels of enjoyment (Kellner, 1998).

Critical media pedagogy provides students with the tools to critically analyze how texts are constructed and in turn construct and position viewers and readers. It provides tools which individuals can use to dissect the instruments of cultural domination, i.e. transform themselves from objects to subjects, from being passive to being active. Thus critical media pedagogy is empowering and enables students to become media literate, able to resist manipulation and domination, and critical producers of meanings and texts (Kellner, 2000). In other words, critical media pedagogy can play a great role in transforming the young media users from passive to active, from recipient to participant, and from consumer to producer. Steven Goodman (2003) looks closely at the possibilities of media education for youth and presents an optimistic outlook. Goodman believes that media education gives youth a critical lens through which they can explore and learn about the world that is directly linked to the possibility of changing it.

3.3.2 Linking Theory and Action

Baecker and Posner (1999), in their article titled “Children as Digital Motion Authors”, provide a qualitative analysis of how authoring and creating motion pictures are compelling to children, are educationally valuable in a wide variety of ways, and can be sustained in various learning environments. They explore the impact of media education on learning environments in terms of structure and interrelationships with other phenomena. Such descriptive knowledge within the qualitative research paradigm is

considered as “constructionism” that can be defined as social reality constructed by participants in that reality.

The authors use their completed prototype of Movie Authoring and Design system called MAD which has been used successfully and enthusiastically in children’s filmmaking projects, and has been combined with careful observation and study of 7th Grade students working on these projects at the University of Toronto Schools in the summer of 1996 and 1997. Their paper clearly describes how their prototype has been challenged and developed into system functionality and user interface through feedback and requests by children as the users of MAD. The authors report positive results through their investigation of children demonstrating enhanced motivation, critical thinking, creative thinking, teamwork, self-expression, enjoyment, and sense of accomplishment. Interestingly, the feedback from children as users of technology helped to improve the functionality and interface of the software to better serve users in media education. The researchers describe their observations, and they believe the importance of media education and critical thinking are key elements to help children better understand the impact of media on their lives.

Baecker and Posner (1999) provide practical opportunities for the young participants to exercise their subjectivity in their media productions and confirm how their productions relate to their existing experiences of the media both as consumers and producers. The authors use the children’s own media production, the process of their production, their challenges, their accomplishments and their self-assessment through interviews, audio and video journals, digital records, paper artifacts, and group discussions as sources of qualitative data. Potentially, the authors could relate their

investigation to critical pedagogy and critical media studies, which shows that media production is embedded with the potential to help students explore their self-identities in order to become more capable of shaping their own destinies and taking action in reshaping their society.

The development of a caring relationship between teacher and student plays a major role in the development of a student's critical thinking and creativity. As Garrison (1997) notes, following and responding to our students' interests will result in the students being internally motivated to learn and that learning is genuinely creative for all concerned. For Garrison, teaching is an important social function of cultural reproduction.

Freire (1992), in *Pedagogy of Hope*, encourages a mutual respect between teacher and student based on the teacher's recognition of the authenticity of the student's experience and perspective. For Freire, dialogue between teachers and students does not place them on the same footing professionally, but it does mark the democratic position between them. Teachers and students are not identical for countless reasons, and it is this difference between them that makes them precisely students and teachers. Were they simply identical, each could be the other. Dialogue is meaningful precisely because the dialogical subjects, the agents in the dialogue, not only retain their identity, but actively defend it, and thus grow together. Precisely on this account, dialogue does not level them, does not "even them out," reduce them to each other. Dialogue is not a favor done by one for the other, a kind of grace accorded. On the contrary, it implies a sincere, fundamental respect on the part of the subjects engaged in it, a respect that is violated, or

prevented from materializing, by authoritarianism. Permissiveness does the same thing, in a different, but equally deleterious way (Freire, 1992).

Martha Nussbaum (2001) believes that public education at every level should cultivate the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings. Critical pedagogy based on Freire's ideas creates what we call an arch of social dreaming (McLaren, 1992). This is a forum for sharing and engaging stories of pain and suffering but also for constructing a new narrative of hope through the development of pedagogy capable of uniting those whose racial gender and class subordination appears to have foreclosed the possibility of an active struggle for emancipated subjecthood (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993).

Critical media pedagogy attempts to recognize the media messages and uncover the underlying ideological frameworks and the links to their power relations (Bazalgette, 1989). Critical media pedagogy seeks to understand how media culture and media industries interact with the economic and political structures. It raises questions about media agencies (who is communicating and why?), media categories (what type of message is it?), media technologies (how is it produced?), media audiences (who receives it and what sense do they make of it?), media languages (how do we know what it means?), and media presentations (how does it present its subject?). Critical media pedagogy stimulates the development of awareness of how social forces are influencing people's lives and how people can better articulate their own experiences, to create and share information, and to facilitate genuine empowerment in communities.

3.4 Conclusions – Youth Engagement Through Critical Media Pedagogy

Media education can provide the tools, skills and creative processes necessary for self-expression through media production. Through media workshops students would be encouraged to think creatively (creating something new or original) and critically (logical thinking and reasoning) that would provide greater understanding of media and technology. Media workshops can offer fictional contexts to illuminate processes of moral response that can influence students in their moral education. Class discussions that engage students in critical thinking on ethical issues addressed in a play or a film are very effective in giving students directions toward developing social and moral reasoning, critical consciousness, and compassion with critical reflection. Creating such a learning environment that leads students to think critically and creatively would help them to develop awareness and the ability to communicate through the project of critical dialogue, multiple subjectivities, agency and repeated experiences in a continuing cycle of action and reflection (Freire, 1973).

For Freire, reflection is the critical component of education. Reflection results in critical consciousness when learners become actors, not observers, and authors of their own decisions. Learning is both an active and reflective process where experiences (action) and thought (reflection) combine to create consciousness (Freire, 1972). Critical consciousness, the goal of an education, is described by Ira Shor (1993) as having the following four qualities: the awareness of power relations within society; the critical literacy necessary to be pro-active in relating and challenging these relationships; the capacity to re-learn new patterns of socialization; and the skills and meta-cognitive ability to engage in life-long learning.

Following the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1972, 1998) and Ira Shore (1992, 1993), critical media pedagogy offers a basic theoretical foundation and critical pedagogical strategies, including the critical deconstruction of media messages, a dialogue and mechanism to allow youth to participate democratically in the learning process, the creative space of expression through media production, and the teaching of skills in the use of various technologies necessary for success in contemporary society.

Youth is a time when energy, passion, and vision for a healthy society can be harnessed and directed towards making positive changes in one's life. In these times, young people need affirmative experiences that build self-esteem and teach responsibilities and ethics. By generating their own messages using a wide range of media, our youth would be given the opportunity to counteract the contradictory perceptions and negative stereotypes advanced by popular media. David Buckingham (1991) argues that, on a superficial level, the mere fact that children spend so much time with the media, and by implication are influenced by it on a daily basis, justifies teaching it at school. If the media are such a major element in children's lives, it seems self-evident that they must exert a powerful influence on their ways of thinking about the world and, as such, teachers simply cannot afford to ignore them. By participating in media programs, youth would be able to develop their abilities and talents in settings that offer non-traditional approaches to learning and opportunities for self-expression both within and beyond school walls.

From a sociological perspective, media are very much a part of the virtual community in which youth participate and are portrayed, and thus need to be addressed within such a policy through media education. There are certainly other ways in which

media education can assist youth in their positive social development, such as body image, family and community relationships and social justice issues.

Critical media pedagogy reflects the multiplicity and creativity of youth engagement in a creative space of producing media where they share experiences and find common interests. It offers practical insights and a conceptualization of media educational environments as creative spaces for fostering certain intellectual abilities associated with creativity in interdisciplinary situations. Learners and teachers, as active participants, through the creative process of media production, can support imaginative expression, autonomy and collaboration. Critical media pedagogy offers opportunities to use new technologies where there is understanding of and opportunities for the variety of creative processes in which participants can engage to be creative in authentic contexts.

It is important to understand the challenges that are emerging from our media oriented society, and a need to develop innovative, practical and positive uses of the media that students, teachers, and parents can implement to create empowering and liberating roles in building critical media awareness, thus, developing solidarity, creativity, and the full and creative development of youth capacities.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEDIA PRODUCTION AS A CREATIVE TOOL

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on creativity as an active process and situates critical media studies as a creative approach to lifelong learning. It explores the significance of media in the creative choice of expression and discusses a perspective of media in the creative process. The chapter extends the previous analysis of critical media pedagogy by a framework influenced by the work of Alfred North Whitehead on education as a growth-oriented process.

4.2 Creativity and Knowledge

Over the centuries painters, sculptors, poets, writers, musicians, and others in the creative arts have frequently discussed creativity. Creativity, often is being defined as a medium for beautifying the environment, and recognizing it as a form of self-expression and communication, or a way of understanding, opening up or coping with the unknown (Cropley, 2001).

People are creative in their everyday lives in various ways, such as the processes used in problem solving, facing challenges and changing ideas about ourselves and our relationship with nature and others in society. Creativity has more to do with people developing something new within them rather than in the world at large. The processes of discovery and creativity lead to changes within our individual capacity. These changes in the individual radiate outwardly and influence the individual's surroundings in an expanding circle of influence with compounding effects bringing tremendous changes to the world.

Creativity is a very broad topic opens to a variety of interpretations. If we think in terms of problem-solving processes, one interpretation will be based on reflection about the principles and purposes of creative approaches in the context of an intervention. There have been many attempts to define creativity and useful theoretical frameworks have been formulated which describe the interaction between qualities in people and communities, creative processes, subject areas, and social contexts.

Creativity can be defined as imaginative activity leading to the production of outcomes that are both original and of immense value. This definition is helpful in that it expresses several characteristics of creativity such as using imagination which is a process, pursuing purpose, being original, and judging value. Value judgment is inherent in our choices and decision making regarding creative outcomes. Thus, critical creativity calls for value judgments in order to become a part of the creativity enhancement process and encourages people “to reflect upon creative outputs and critically assess their suitability for taking forward to a problem solving process” (Ragsdell, 2001, p. 105).

According to Plato (360 B.C.E.), seeing plays a major role in human life. Plato believes that seeing impacts on development of language, art, and science. For Plato the notion of seeing is not accidental but led by inquiry. Noticing is a kind of seeing that leads to discovery of logical patterns, inter-relationships, and organized set of interrelated ideas or principles forming a complex whole. This discovery opens a channel for creation of a language for effective communication. Plato suggests a method for creativity where the process of noticing, critical thinking, and creative producing is the essence of experiencing and understanding the world.

Creativity can be regarded as not only a quality found in exceptional individuals,

but also “an essential life skill through which people can develop their potential in using their imagination to express themselves, and make original and valued choices in their lives” (Loveless, 2003, p. 2). Media production is not only a tool which can be used by youth to develop critical thinking and critical creativity in the creative process, but its characteristics can also make a distinctive contribution to those processes, providing new tools, media and environments for learning to be creative and learning through being creative in educational environment.

4.3 The Role of Creativity in Education

Understanding the nature of creativity in scope and depth is an important aspect of critical media pedagogy in educational environment. Generally, creativity is regarded as personal qualities and characteristics of exceptional individuals in our culture.

However, creativity can be considered as a potential for all individuals in different knowledge domains, or subjects not confined to traditional definitions of arts or sciences. It can be recognized and valued at the level of individuals, peer groups or wider social contexts, and can be considered an essential element in the participation of and the contribution to the life and culture of society.

The importance of creativity in education relies on many factors such as providing opportunities for young people to pursue their interests and talents, enhancing critical thinking, communication and problem solving skills, increasing self-esteem, improving the pace of learning, opening up new and innovative ideas, taking risks and making mistakes in a non-threatening and safe educational environments, reflection, resourcefulness and resiliency, collaboration on outcomes and construction of shared knowledge, and equipping youth for their future lives as democratic citizens,

contributors, and producers of meanings.

Friere (1998) defines genuine learning as an attitude that reflects curiosity, exploration, discovery, creation, and re-creation. For Friere, education is acquiring knowledge for a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context. Greene (2001) views education as a process of enabling persons to become different, to enter the multiple provinces of meaning that create perspectives on the works. Greene (1995b) talks about the process of making, creating, and weaving. She believes that "the learner must break with the taken-for-granted, and look through the lenses of various ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling in a conscious endeavor to impose different orders upon experience" (Greene, 2001, p. 5).

"Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge" (Whitehead, 1929b, p. 4). For Whitehead, education is a growth-oriented process, in which both student and subject matter move progressively. There are three fundamental stages in this process, which Whitehead called the stage of romance, the stage of precision, and the stage of generalization. "The stage of romance is the stage of first apprehension" (Whitehead, 1929b, p.17) in the educational experience and primary acquisition of knowledge that involves freshness, enthusiasm, and enjoyment of learning. The stage of precision is about the "exactness of formulation" (Whitehead, 1929b, p. 18). Precision is discipline in the various languages and grammars of specialized subject matters such as art, science, as well as technical subjects such as communication and technology. Generalization is the final stage, incorporating romance and precision into a wise mode of becoming in form of general context and wholeness of logical ideas and classifications. It is the moment of educational completeness and "fruition which has

been the goal of the precise training” (Whitehead, 1929b, p.19). These stages motivate youth for fresh experiences of excitement, romance, imagination, and creativity in the educational process.

For Whitehead (1933, pp. 309–381) civilization is constituted by five fundamental ideals: beauty, truth, art, adventure, and peace. These five ideals are the essence, the aims, and the rhythm of education that constitute a rich meaning of creativity as the ultimate driving source and goal of education. Thus, creativity in education can encompass learning as creative in order to produce work that has originality and value to individuals, peers and societies, as well as supporting imaginative expression, autonomy, collaboration, romance, precision, generalization of insights, and developing the abilities of thinking and realizing possibilities in making choices in everyday life.

4.4 Imagination, Creativity, and the Choice of Medium

“Let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened
or unenlightened...”

Plato, *The Republic*

Children use their imagination to learn about inter-relational processes of the world around them. For example, they learn to identify and analyze the different letters of the alphabet and then put together the letters to synthesize and construct words as the representation of meanings. This may explain why children learn languages in a short period of time. Immanuel Kant (1797, pp. 372-373), in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*, magnifies the important roles of intuition and imagination in how we acquire knowledge. For Kant, the imagination is the main driving force for construction of

meanings that are represented as knowledge. Greene calls the blue guitar in Stevens' poem a metaphor for the imagination:

*They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."
The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."*

(Stevens, 1982, p. 165)

She interprets imagination in Steven's poem as "the mode of grasping, of reaching out that allows what is perceived to be transformed." (Greene, 2001, p. 31) Greene emphasizes the importance of having a space for allowing imagination to foster imaginative awareness and alternative possibilities: "it ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their groups' becoming"(1995a, p. 39). For Greene, art is a creation of one's own action constructed by the imagination. According to Whitehead (1929b, p. 93), "Youth is imaginative, and if the imagination be strengthened by discipline this energy of imagination can in great measure be preserved through life".

Generally, in the world of education, language and math are measured by the logic of the test that has a predetermined answer conforming to an idealized standard. Media education, in the other hand, measures success through a portfolio that reveals the change and growth in the development of life skills and dispositions that influence critical thinking, imagination, ability to dream, expression, reflection, critical creativity, representation, and contribution in the ever changing process of becoming. We activate

our awareness, Greene (1995b, p. 381) emphasizes, “by becoming aware of ourselves as questioners, as makers of meaning, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, we may be able to communicate to students the notion that reality depends on perspective, that its construction is never complete, and that there is always something more”. Greene emphasizes the major role of the arts and artistic expressions in releasing human imagination and creativity, thus enabling the youth to reach toward their vision of the possible. She suggests progressive approaches to teaching and learning that encourage both students and teachers to take initiatives, to transcend limits, and to pursue freedom, not in solitude, but in reciprocity with others, not in privacy, but in public space (Greene, 1988).

Creativity synthesizes the enduring possibilities that exist between destruction and construction. Imagination lets us put the parts together and take them apart in an endless process, repeating but always becoming new. For Regnier, “Imagination holds the promise of calling our best of possibilities of learning into being, of disclosing faces of reality, of unconcealing hidden truths, of realizing important values, of actualizing potentials” (Regnier, 2006, p.1). Consequently, in a real sense, we create our own selves every moment, here, and now. Creativity is motivated by curiosity, an urge to generate, and a desire to reflect on its actions. Creativity requires a choice of the medium to hold our image in an expressive form. Thus, it is a disposition of play, process of romance, discovery, adventure, noticing the uniqueness of the artistic expressions, and inventiveness that is acknowledged by an audience in a space of public event.

The representation of creativity is an act of choosing a medium of expression such as, words, facial expression, body language, image making, dance, or film to

communicate with an audience. Arts, science, and humanities mark and record ways of communication and the choice of medium throughout history. The cave paintings represent an ongoing exploration in choosing paint as a medium and techniques to visually represent a world. This is an early example of ways of communication by artists who generated knowledge of their world by choosing a medium that communicates.

How we define the relationship between materials and medium needs be understood in physical and conceptual terms. Medium can be understood as the subject in the statement: “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, Fiore, and Angel, 1967) as a means of explaining how the distribution of the message can often be more important than the message itself. The definitions of medium can be as different as artist’s or scientist’s raw materials, a scientific technique, or a form of communication. Some characteristic elements describe the creative process of expression in a specific medium such as sound, rhythm, and silence in music; numbers, symbols and shapes in mathematics; paint, clay, and canvas in fine arts; story, dialogue, and moving images in media. In a teaching and learning environment, however, “giving students opportunities to be creative requires allowing them to find and solve problems and communicate ideas in novel and appropriate ways” (Starko, 2005, p. 17). Creativity requires understanding of the medium and its storytelling tools, and integrating imagination as well as identifying the target audience in a space of public event.

Advanced technology and accessibility to a wide range of electronic networks of media have created new possibilities for active engagement of youth in digital film production as a means of artistic self-expression and effective communication that enable creative thinking in a creative space for learning. The creative process of media

production is the aesthetic reflection of the creativity through media production as a result of one's decision to actively engage in using the medium as an expressive and artistic communication tool. This creative process reflects in forms of images (still or motion pictures), music, sounds, voices, dialogues, texts, and ideas through understanding and appreciating the language of media enhanced by practical experience producing and utilizing that language. These created media productions can be understood through aesthetic reflection. The aesthetic reflection involves curiosity, adventures of discovery, imagination, feeling the beauty of the world, noticing the uniqueness of the artistic expressions, and generalization of insight (Whitehead, 1929a, 1933, and Woodhouse, 1995).

4.5 Lifelong Learning and Creative Space of Media Production

Kant (1797) believes that knowledge is the ultimate goal. He suggests a “constitution allowing the greatest possible human freedom in accordance with laws by which the freedom of each is made to be consistent with that of all others”(p. 373). For Kant, “it is in the power of freedom to pass beyond any and every specified limit” (Kant, 1797, p. 373). This ability to go beyond the specified limit is precisely the measure of creativity's freedom in the arts and sciences. Maxine Greene (2001) calls this “thinking outside of the box”.

How does the creative space of media production engage the senses to construct ideas that become synthesized into knowledge? How we think about the space of learning should include creative exploration and acting on choices that model the freedom of expression. Greene (2001) suggests that what aesthetic theory provokes in the classroom is engaged perceivers acting on behalf of their own choices in determining

outcomes. The implication of aesthetic education is that learning is in the hands of the student. While many progressive schools have a place for the arts in student learning, aesthetic education places the arts at the center of learning through the creative process that is led by aesthetic judgment.

Media production as an aesthetic and creative process of critical media pedagogy offers an approach to learning that allows playful engagements for exploring active learning. Aesthetics can be described as awareness beyond sense and reason, and opens the possibilities of ethical self-assessment for lifelong learning. Critical media pedagogy provides a synthetic space for creativity that enables youth to attend critically and engage imaginatively to the aesthetic spaces of media as forms of creative works of art, and recognize the expanding energy in time and space, and creating new possibilities in the infinite process of becoming.

The creative process of youth media production is an awakening method and “an intellectual survey of alternative possibilities” (Whitehead, 1929b, p. 93) for developing an awareness of our world that influences critical thinking, aesthetic inquiry, creative engagements, and heuristic reflection of creativity and innovation. Creative processes of media production through critical interpretations and aesthetic reflection of the creativity create excitement, passion, and romance that stimulate both sense and reason and lead to synthetic learning. The learning process happens in the event of the creation of media through an act of reflection. The act of learning occurs in a spontaneous process of action-reflection that leads to an awakening discovery, and critical creativity. The creative process of youth media production is an awakening method for developing an awareness of our world that influences critical thinking, aesthetic inquiry, creative

engagements, and heuristic reflection of creativity and innovation that can touch the heart as well as the mind. Critical media pedagogy is a creative approach to lifelong learning. The processes of youth media education, particularly creativity in collaborative and exploratory practice of youth digital media productions, are relevant to and affirming of socio-cultural experiences of youth.

In media production, youth participants simultaneously engage in dynamic creative processes and projects in order to develop a critical creativity that challenges and engages participants through question asking, exploration and strategic development of proposals, scripts, and the stages of pre-production, production, and post-production. Action and aesthetic reflection of the creativity in media production allows experience to embrace the limits and the limitlessness of one's creative self in a search for fulfillment. The outcome of these processes potentially can develop improvement on academic advancement, critical citizenship (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, 2005), and opportunities for a more relevant and stimulating experience, allowing for a pause in formal acquisition of knowledge, thus fostering progressive perspectives that offer possibilities for social transformation.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes conclusions from my analysis of critical media production for youth, and considers several implications that arise from this work. In this thesis, I have explored the effects of media on youth as well as media education as an alternative to alleviate passive and uncritical consumption of media such as television, the internet, and computer games among youth.

The thesis has been organized around several core questions concerning how young people move from being consumers to being producers of media; how passive knowledge can become activated through a creative process of media production; what relationship exists between media education, critical creativity, and creative practice of youth in media production; how creative practice can relate to and reference everyday life; and how social identities can be formed around the engagement of youth in active process of creativity in media production practices?

I have addressed these questions through a framework that focuses on how media education may be framed so as to encourage critical thinking and creative producing of meanings in the mind of students while responding to their curiosity and adventures of discovery in collaborative and exploratory practices of media productions. I have explored the literature on critical pedagogical theory that developed through the Frankfurt School and has evolved through postmodern influences and the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Douglas Kellner, and other contemporary scholars.

My analysis has shown how youth have the potential and right to study and understand how the media operate and to learn the critical and production skills of media. The answer to many of the questions I have posed become facilitated, in part, by the increasing availability of new technologies which offer more opportunities for youth to become informed producers of media rather than passive consumers. We need to recognize that participation involves more than critical consumption. Media education or media literacy is about both reading and writing, not just critical understanding, but also about creative media production. Media education needs to involve both critical analysis (reflection) and practical, creative production (action). It is about giving youth access to the means of cultural production and expression, and encouraging them to use those means in a thoughtful and critical way.

The creative processes of media production require aesthetic reflection on the creativity through media production as a result of young people's decisions actively to engage in using the medium as an expressive and artistic communication tool. This creative process can be conveyed in forms of images (still or motion pictures), music, sounds, voices, dialogues, texts, and ideas through understanding and appreciating the language of media enhanced by practical experience producing and utilizing that language. These created media productions can be understood through aesthetic reflection. The aesthetic reflection involves curiosity, adventures of discovery, imagination, feeling the beauty of the world, noticing the uniqueness of the artistic expressions, and generalization of insight. Creativity in youth media education can encompass learning as creative process in order to produce work that has originality and value to individuals, peers and societies, as well as supporting imaginative expression,

autonomy, collaboration, romance, precision, generalization of insights, and developing the abilities of thinking and realizing possibilities in making choices in everyday life.

My thesis offers a basis upon which to synthesize positive insights from all current media pedagogical approaches into a more cohesive, critical, exploratory, and creative practices of media education that can potentially offer possibilities in developing critical thinking, critical creativity, and a sense of fulfillment for lifelong learning. The thesis works towards a synthesis which enables us to rethink the place of the creativity as having a vital role in lifelong learning through youth media production in a creative process of critical media pedagogy.

Critical media pedagogy attempts to recognize the media messages and uncover the underlying ideological frameworks and the links to their power relations (Bazalgette, 1989). Critical media pedagogy seeks to understand how media culture and media industries interact with the economic and political structures. It raises questions about media agencies (who is communicating and why?), media categories (what type of message is it?), media technologies (how is it produced?), media audiences (who receives it and what sense do they make of it?), media languages (how do we know what it means?), and media presentations (how does it present its subject?).

Critical media pedagogy stimulates the development of awareness of how social forces are influencing people's lives and how people can better articulate their own experiences, to create and share information, and to facilitate genuine empowerment in communities. Media production as an aesthetic and creative process of critical media pedagogy offers an approach to learning that allows playful engagements for exploring active learning.

5.2 Media Production as a Space of Creativity for Lifelong Learning

The issues raised in this thesis have implications to open new possibilities for future research with a worthy contribution to the academic and professional communities. In particular, the thesis points to the possibilities that can arise from research to examine the context of YMW's educational programs. I suggest in this section prospects for a case study that may contribute to the discussion of media education as a space of creativity for lifelong learning in a broader context. This research would be informed by the insights from critical social theory (including the Frankfurt School's critical theory and postmodernist thought), and a Whiteheadian perspective in process philosophy for lifelong learning. The case study will present media production as a means of assisting young people in exploring their self-identities, developing critical thinking skills, practicing creativity, understanding, and representing their social position. The research direction will be defined through interaction with youth participants. It draws on models of empowering classroom-based research such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) to validate and give voice to young people's experiences, challenges, and accomplishments through language and through their own media productions.

The concept of "learning by doing" in which learning is perceived as experiential and reflexive is fundamental to this approach. It recognizes that people learn through the active adaptation of their existing knowledge in response to their experiences with other people and their environment. Moreover the process of building on experience is a natural one for most people. PAR provides a framework for formalizing and making this process more effective. PAR is a method that involves the researcher in joining in with the activities of the group being studied. PAR is defined as a journey with shifting

questions and doubts, points of critical awareness, moments of celebration, and connections that demonstrate a deepening understanding of lived and transformed realities (Willms, 1997).

The development of critical thinking and critical creativity in the creative process of media production will be natural complements to PAR through themes such as creativity, empowerment, and a continuous lifelong learning philosophy. PAR “ aims at creating an environment in which participants give and get valid information, make free and informed choices (including the choice to participate), and generate internal commitment to the results of the inquiry” (Argyris and Schon, 1991, p. 86).

The subjects of this research can be recruited primarily through the young people attending media workshops at YMW’s one week summer camps and the six weeks after-school programs. It can include a gender balance, an age range of 14 -18, possibly some ethnic diversity, and a variety of media interests and ambitions. These young people will be attending media workshops focusing on a variety of aspects of media production at different levels of training. As a researcher and co-participant, the researcher can assist other participants to investigate their own realities and take action as a result of this research. This research will require ethics review and approval because of the involvement of human participants in the media workshops.

The researcher can potentially use participants’ own media production, the process of their production, their challenges, their accomplishments, their self-assessment, and their teachers’ evaluations as sources of data. The researcher observe different conclusions arising from participants themselves in order to stimulate her/his inquiry concerning the ways in which participants are addressed and have been

addressed. The researcher can identify the differences in learning in participants with the aim of gathering the necessary data that can provide evidence of their having learned. The researcher will continuously assess through interviews how their style and vision changes in response to the challenges they face over a three-month period. The researcher can develop two types of interview protocols for generating sources of data: one for participants' self-assessments as primary sources of data, and one for teachers for evaluating/observing participants as secondary sources of data based on the following areas of development:

1. Developing media literacy and media production skills: awareness of the impact of media on youth culture, ability to analyze and interpret media messages, visual dialogue and communication, critical and creative thinking, pre-production, production, and post-production

2. Developing Youth Employability Skills (The Conference Board of Canada, 2000): teamwork, communication skills, problem solving and thinking skills, responsibility to a group project, self-confidence, self-expression, and commitment

Methods for analyzing the data can be developed in the course of the study. The emphasis will be on generating information and clear descriptions of young people's experiences, and on examining the diverse ways in which their identities are socially constructed and negotiated. The researcher will meet regularly to discuss with participants and my research committee members the findings and the write up of the research thesis.

In addition to publishing this research and the case study as a book or a web site, there are prospects to document the process from the early stages of the research

development to the completion of the project, which could yield a documentary film directed by the researcher. This project also has the potential to further active engagement by youth through an exhibition-based event around the visual productions of the young participants involved in the research.

5.3 Conclusions

Critical media literacy is about both reading and writing, not just critical understanding, but also about creative production. The creative process of youth media production provides a creative space for learning that influences critical thinking, creative engagement, and heuristic reflection of creativity and innovation. This process is the aesthetic reflection of the creativity through media production as a result of youth's decision to move from being passive consumers to becoming producers of media by actively engaging in the use of media as an expressive and artistic communication tool that reflects in forms of images (still or motion pictures), music, sounds, voices, dialogues, texts, and ideas. These created media productions can be understood through aesthetic reflection that involves curiosity, adventures of discovery, noticing the uniqueness of the artistic expressions, and generalization of insight.

Creativity in youth media education can encompass learning as creative process in order to produce meanings that has originality and value to individuals, peers and societies, as well as supporting imaginative expression, autonomy, collaboration, romance, precision, generalization of insights, and developing the abilities of thinking and realizing possibilities in making choices in everyday life. Creative process of media production through critical interpretations and aesthetic reflection of the creativity creates excitement and passion that stimulates both sense and reason and leads to synthetic

learning. The learning process happens in the event of the creation of media through an act of reflection. The act of learning occurs in a spontaneous process of action-reflection that leads to an awakening discovery, and critical creativity.

Critical media literacy is a creative approach to lifelong learning and the processes of youth media education, particularly creativity in collaborative and exploratory practice of youth digital media productions, are relevant to and affirming of socio-cultural experiences of youth. The outcome of these processes can have positive impact on academic advancement, critical citizenship, and opportunities for a more relevant and stimulating experience, allowing for a pause in formal acquisition of knowledge, thus fostering progressive perspectives that offer possibilities for social transformation.

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