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Critical media literacy for uncertain times: Promoting student reflexivity

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ABSTRACT

Developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) add urgency to the claim that democracy requires media literate citizens. The purpose of this paper is to support media engagement by youth in a context characterized by the spread of misinformation through the very technologies that promise to democratize public debate. Rejecting literacy as a "skill", our work illustrates how informed judgment during media engagement can be promoted by student reflexivity. Drawing on our research with teachers, we identify six modes of student reflexivity: personal, affective, evidentiary, analytical, ethical, and political. Each mode can be prompted through a line of questioning that attends to the role of media engagement in re/constituting the social world, offline as well as online. These modes prepare youth for an active citizenship promoting social justice through what we call "critical social literacy".

Keywords: *critical media literacy, informed judgment, student reflexivity, critical social literacy, teaching for social justice*.

INTRODUCTION

Developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) add urgency to the claim that a democratic society requires media literate citizens. This urgency reflects, on the one hand, optimism in the opportunity afforded by ICTs for a more participatory public dialogue (Jenkins, 2006), but on the other, for media practices that can undermine faith in (if not the actuality of) democracy itself through the spread of misinformation. This paper addresses the challenge of supporting media engagement[1] by youth in a context characterized by such uncertainty. Our distinctly *social* approach (that we call critical social literacy or CSL) to literacy education retains the optimism of treating media engagement as an opportunity to foster inclusive public discourse, while remaining cognizant of the dangers that the openness of ICTs poses to such a discourse.

Because social and cultural conditions shape media engagement, they cannot be ignored when considering how technology can foster civic engagement.[2] At the local level, those conditions include the material setting; the people present and their social relationships; the ethnic, gendered, and sexual identities of those present; what these people know; and how they understand their situation (Gee, 2004, p. 28-29). Not immediately visible, but nevertheless at play, are extra-local processes that control the production and dissemination of media messaging, as well as of ICTs themselves. In this paper, we describe how CSL can support participation in public dialogue, taking these conditions into account. We first describe the study upon which this paper is based. Rejecting literacy as a "skill", this study promoted reflexive deliberation by students about media practices that reconstitute, but also challenge, inequities that characterize the current social order. In this paper we identify six modes of student reflexivity that support teaching for social justice.

Pop Culture and Power: Teaching for social justice

The authors teach in Sociology and Educational Studies at a university in western Canada. Our materialism posits a reality, forged over time through coordinated social activities that sustain (or challenge) oppression through intersectional relations of class, gender, race, and generation. Processes that structure these relations are part of what we include as "material" conditions of media engagement operating below the level of ordinary consciousness. CSL is about bringing these processes into analysis through interrogation of the power of media to orchestrate meaning making (hence social action) across geographically and culturally disparate populations. In the words of Mirra et al. (2018): "Teachers and students must analyze not only the text itself, but also the roles of the creator, the audience, and the stakeholders" (p. 14) who benefit from media production and dissemination.

With Fujino et al. (2018) we maintain that education "demands critique of, and intervention in, social problems and structures of oppression. We seek to create a society where people learn not merely to be governed but to govern, with mutual respect" (p. 69). Recognizing "social justice" as contested,[3] we do not prescribe a vision for the future; rather, as teachers we support young people in coming to imagine, and in giving voice to, the kind of world they want to live in. *Pop Culture and Power* – the project upon which this paper is based – grew from our interest in working with teachers to advance such a goal. It explores how media engagement with pop culture can foster young people's commitment to act against social and environmental injustice, and to consider multiple viewpoints through ethical engagement with others.

To foster such a commitment, we were attracted to critical media literacy (CML). In general, *critical thinking* refers to evaluation of knowledge claims through logic and evidence applied in an objective manner (see Hitchcock, 2018). In *critical literacy*, "criticality" attends to power relations that enable specific claims to be made, in order to assess whether knowledge claims work to reconstitute – or to challenge – existing social inequities (see Kellner & Share, 2009). In our view, CML must support sound judgment during media engagement if it is to work towards a more equitable future.

CML is often described as empowering people through what Freire calls "conscientization" (Kellner &

[1] "Media engagement" refers to: media consumption, media production, distributing media texts (through "share", for example, on Facebook), and commenting on or rating media texts (through "likes", for example, on YouTube).

[2] A further question is whether technology that remains under the control of corporations can promote civic engagement (see Fuchs, 2014).

[3] The meaning of "social justice" is contested and always shifting. We maintain: "It would be self-defeating for educators to employ unjust or harmful practices in service of teaching their vision of a better, more just and humane society" (Kelly, 2012, p. 137-138). For this reason, we embrace the ambiguity of the phrase, "teaching for social justice".

Share, 2019, p. xi). Empowerment is attributed to the ability of media users to recognize the relationship between information and power, through "skills to probe empirical evidence, evaluate subjective biases, analyze the medium and construction of the text, and explore the multiple meanings and social contexts of media texts" (Kellner & Share, 2019, xii, xvii). CML tools and frameworks offer to help students "become subjects in the process of deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling together to create a better society" (Garcia, Seglem & Share, 2013, p. 12).

Sharing these goals, CSL treats media as a venue for the operation of power; we emphasize *venue* to avoid conflating power with media themselves. While power is implicit in the very notion of critical literacy, it remains taken-for-granted in approaches that fail to interrogate the relationship between media messaging and power as a social phenomenon. We thus distinguish "agency" (as the capacity for intentional action, such as that exercised during media engagement) from "power" (as the configuration of social and cultural conditions that enable, but also constrain, agency). This distinction enables us to explore how students can use media to produce alternative messaging in a context where ICTs shape media engagement.

K-12 teachers interested in working with us were recruited on the basis of their commitment to social justice; while these participants shared an interest in using popular culture in their classrooms, their backgrounds in media studies were limited. We therefore initiated our research with a professional development seminar, held weekly for three months, in media analysis. Following established tenets of media education, we viewed critical literacy as:

> The ability to challenge existing power relations in texts and to produce new texts that delegitimize these relations; a consciousness of the relationship between the dominant culture's use of language, literacy and social injustice; the ability not only to read words but to read the world into and onto texts and recognize the correlation between the word and the world; and the ability to create political texts that inspire transformative action and conscious reflection. (Morrell, 2004, p. 57, cited by Bishop, 2014, p. 59).

Drawing on our previous research in cultural studies, we integrated these elements into our seminar through analysis of a wide range of cultural artifacts, keeping in mind the reception and social effects of media (see Hammer & Kellner, 2009). Our goal was to advance literacy as "a set of social practices … embedded in social contexts and social relations" (Buckingham & Burn, 2007, p.328) and media engagement as a practice of social change (for full details, see Currie & Kelly, 2022). While we benefitted from the work of previous educators and researchers, because our interest entails using media to promote change – within but beyond the text – we treated media as an expression of the operation of power, and literacy as the ability to trace this power to its origins in human relations and practices.

The output of the seminar included media activities designed by course participants.[4] Four of these projects were subsequently piloted by teachers in their classrooms. The current paper is based on ethnographic data generated as teacher participants facilitated classroom activities. During data analysis, "fake news" emerged as a new challenge for media literacy education. While not a focus of our original study, the purpose of this paper is to explore how CSL can help address the challenge of supporting media engagement in an environment colonized by fake news as disinformation, as well as misinformation. This paper was motivated by the emerging concern that media practices by youth can amplify the spread of "fake news".

Media engagement in the context of dis/misinformation

The designation of fake news as deliberate falsehood (rather than satire or entertainment) reflects its use by Trump and his supporters to delegitimize critics. Given its role in Trump's presidency, concern has been expressed that the deliberate dissemination of misinformation – enhanced by new ITCs – poses a serious threat to democracy. What caught our attention is research suggesting that, like their adult counterparts, youth engage in media practices that play a role in the spread of fake news.

The ubiquity of personal digital devices (in particular, smartphones and tablets) has given youth unlimited access to information and the ability to network globally. In 2018, the Pew Research Center reported that 95% of teens[5] in the USA have access to a

[4] Limitations of the current format prevent us from describing the conceptual tools that framed the activities discussed below (for details, see Currie & Kelly, 2022). These activities were designed and facilitated by participating teachers with the assistance of four graduate research assistants who worked with the authors as well as the teachers. We are indebted to the hard work of: Amy, LJ, Paulina and Zavi.

[5] "Teens" are youth 13 to 17 years of age. Pew Research recognizes that access to media, and media practices, differ

smartphone, with 45% saying they are online "almost constantly", and another 44% report that they go online "several times a day" (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Researchers have also documented that 50% of young people aged 18 to 29 get their news from online sources (Addison, 2018; also see Middaugh, 2019, p. 44). YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are cited as the most popular online platforms. The spread of misinformation (deliberate or otherwise) through these platforms has stimulated research about online media practices, of both adults and youth.[6]

Drawing on research in adolescent development, Middaugh (2019) suggests that media practices associated with the online spread of misinformation apply to youth. These practices include: the attraction to "outrage" discourse[7] (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017); basing the veracity of information on its ranking in a data feed (Armendarez, 2018, p. 116; McGrew et al. 2019, p. 60); trusting stories posted online by friends and forwarding these messages, often unread, based on a shared worldview (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017, p. 450; Pangrazio, 2018, p. 7). As Share et al. (2019, p. 2) note, given that gatekeeping of digital information is minimal or absent, we need to attend to how young people make judgments when online. This view is supported by research: after surveying 7,804 students across the United States, researchers at Stanford University concluded that young people's ability to reason about information on the Internet is, "in one word: *bleak*" (Wineburg et al., 2016, p. 4; emphasis in original). In effect, while misinformation may not originate in media produced by youth, media practices lacking sound judgment have the potential to amplify the problem.

Within this context, literacy educators and researchers offer strategies to verify online information, boosting the popularity of online "fact checking" sites. Informed by practices of professional fact checkers, McGrew et al. (2019) developed "easy-to-use scoring guides" that enable educators to quickly determine "whether students possessed the skills needed to make sound judgments" (p. 62). Students are scored on whether they can answer three questions: who is behind this information; what is the evidence; what do other sources say?

While we see value in fact checking, research suggests that efforts to correct false knowledge with scientific data can actually backfire by making the false information more familiar (Endacotte et al., 2018, p. 101). Moreover, the sheer volume of competing information available on any topic can promote "information exasperation" (Willinsky, 1999). Heuristics designed to evaluate media content generally fail to capture the complex and multifaceted nature of evaluation (Forzani, 2019). As described by Journell (2019), "cognitive filters, logical fallacies, poor reasoning skills, inadequate access to all the facts, belief in things that are not true, not knowing what you do not know" all interfere with people's ability "to draw conclusions that are well-grounded" (p. 75). While these elements are important, they do not take into account socio-cultural factors that can curtail, but also support, the exercise of good judgment. Missing factors include social relations and practices that shape both social reality and mediated engagement with that reality. Because literacy needs to include these factors, our framework for the seminar took literacy beyond notions of "skill".

Beyond skill: Literacy as informed judgment

While we do not dismiss the importance of verification, we find literacy that narrowly focuses on separating fact from fiction insufficient for critical literacy. This focus can perpetuate the kind of binary thinking (true/false, us/them) that critical literacy emerged to address. Such thinking fosters the formation of divisive online communities, offering little hope for considered deliberation of controversial social issues.

When evaluated by teachers as a "skill," literacy becomes an endpoint, rather than a process through which changes in values and understandings can occur. Operationalized as an outcome, literacy becomes a mechanical task that "can be trained by extensive practice without regard to particular context" (Barrow, 1990, p. 282; also see Ruitenberg, 2018). As argued by Meola (2004): "If we teach students to surrender evaluation to a mechanical process, we teach them to sacrifice part of their autonomy as learners and knowers" (p. 338).

among this population by household income, gender, and ethnic background.

[6] The spread of misinformation has also stimulated research on how these platforms purposely manipulate user practices (see, for example, de Roock, 2020; Kohnen et al., 2020; Pangrazio, 2018).

[7] "Outrage discourse" refers to language intended to provoke strong emotional responses, such as anger, disgust, moral indignation, and so on. It is often coupled with misleading facts, overgeneralizations, and personal attacks (Middaugh, 2019, p. 47).

In the place of skill, CSL promotes *informed judgment* during, and as an outcome of, media engagement. By *informed* we refer to decision making based on consideration of media as a venue for the operation of power and recognition of how media can be used to promote social justice. This consideration can be evaded when socially motivated meanings come to "feel" as if a "natural expression" of what exists; media users are discouraged from recognizing, let alone challenging, those meanings, hence the activities they coordinate. One goal of CSL is to disrupt this normalization, by directing attention to the interests and values embedded in media texts, and their origin in practices and relations that scaffold inequalities. While the power of media originates in these practices and social relations, this origin is not always readily apparent in the digital era. However, the values, practices and relations through which media texts are produced are embodied by the text; they are knowable, rendering the origin of power operating through the text knowable. In our work they can be known through interrogation of the text.

Through interrogation CSL traces the power afforded by media messaging to its origin in social practices and relations that precede it. This interrogation is based on a materialist ontology inspired by Marx's analysis of commodities as holding the "secret" of capitalist production. As the product of human labor, media – like commodities – embody the relations that make their production possible. These relations and the practices they afford are a characteristic of the text and can be revealed through deepened levels of interrogation. The first level concerns the text as a cultural artifact: What does the text say? What kind of world does it configure? How does the text work to construct its preferred meaning? The second level concerns the text as mediated communication that coordinates social action: How is the text taken up by readers? Who is invited into, and who is excluded from, the text's figured world? The third level concerns the origin of the text in socially motivated activity: How was the text produced, and for what purpose? How is its messaging disseminated? In the place of treating media texts as simply "information", they can be read as participating in ongoing practices that bring the social world into being. Because the power of media is recognized as the coordination of social practices across geographically disparate sites of meaning making, social responsibilities that accompany media engagement are highlighted.

Judgment based on an understanding of how power operates through media is necessary if we expect youth to make responsible choices as media participants. Pandya and Aukerman (2014) caution that if teachers do not provide specific attention "to building children's *critical competencies,* we suspect that both children and teachers will remain focused on interpreting, creating, and sharing (digital) texts at the expense of analyzing and critiquing the power relations that underlie and are formed by texts" (p. 432). Literacy promoting social change must be informed by decision-making that supports inclusive and respectful media participation. Responsible media engagement by youth requires self-awareness as to their role in the re/constitution of social reality. "By focusing on the creation, dissemination and reception of individual expression, young citizens can reflect on the content of their voice, and also on the power they have to be part of a larger civic dialog" (Mihailidis and Thevenin, 2013, p. 1618). What we call *reflexive* interrogation locates youth, as users and producers of meaning, within this dialog as a collective activity.

Reflexivity mediates between what we designate as the "agency" of media engagement and the "objective structural or cultural" powers that shape that agency. Archer (2000) describes reflexivity as a running "mental commentary which always precedes, accompanies and reflects upon our actions" (p. 319). She (2007) maintains that to practice reflexivity is "to pose questions to ourselves and to answer them, to speculate about ourselves, any aspect of our environment and, above all, about the relationship between them" (p. 63). In everyday life these kinds of deliberations may not take place at a conscious level; *reflexive interrogation* of CSL brings them into consideration during media engagement.

The criticality of media engagement is not, however, "a purely individual trait":

> Because criticality is a function of collective questioning, criticism, and creativity, it is always social in character, partly because relations to others influence the individual, and partly because certain of these activities (particularly thinking in new ways) arise from an interaction with challenging alternative views. (Burbules and Berk, 1999, p. 62).

In the classroom this interaction engages learners in the exercise of judgment as "forming opinions *with* and *through* our encounters with others" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012, p. 198-199).

While other educators may employ the term *critical thinking*, reflexive interrogation goes beyond thinking

by connecting it to self-conscious decision making about exercising agency as a participant of the social world. *Reflexive* interrogation enables learners to "navigate change and diversity, learn-as-they-go, solve problems, collaborate and be flexible and creative" (Kalantizis et al. 2003, p. 23). In our work, reflexive interrogation encourages media use in ethically responsible ways. In a context of "others", diversity in the classroom becomes a teaching resource by providing opportunities for debate and sharing that deepen consideration of the social nature of media engagement. This debate and sharing means that the outcome of reflexive interrogation cannot be anticipated, and thus cannot be assessed through predesigned measures.

In summary, critical *social* literacy is based on reflexive interrogation of media texts, taking place through conversation with self and others. Prompting reflexive interrogation during media activities is a *means* for learning; learning does not come through "correct" answers according to the teacher, but through subsequent evaluation, by students, of their own answers. In the following section, we (briefly) illustrate how reflexive interrogation was prompted by teachers in our study.

REFLEXIVITY IN ACTION: SUPPORTING INFORMED JUDGMENT

Below we draw on interviews with teacher participants, as well as classroom observations, to illustrate how teacher participants promoted student reflexivity during our study. To provide context, we first describe the activities from which we have drawn examples. These activities were designed by teacher participants, enabling them to tailor activities to their mandated subject area,[8] while meeting the specific needs of their students. Here we draw on three projects. In the first, Yvette engaged her Grade 4/5 students in the creation of board games, introduced by playing the popular board game *Monopoly.* By playing *Monopoly,* students could experience disparities in wealth distribution, stimulating the design of games supporting more equitable outcomes. The second project was designed by Natalie, for her Grade 11/12 marketing class. In this project, students explored how gendered identities are used to market music videos to youth. Groups challenged gender stereotyping by redesigning video performances. The third project was an out-of-school activity with a small group of girls aged 16 to 18. Amy, who taught art, explored how advertisements are designed to "hail"[9] specific kinds of readers. The girls used advertising's "mode of address" to redesign ads that "talked back" to their corporate creators. For all three cases, students interrogated meanings offered by existing texts, but focused attention on the reception of media produced by learners themselves, making the case studies useful for teachers preparing youth to engage with social media. With this in mind, we describe how teacher participants prompted reflexive interrogation during classroom activities in ways that support informed judgment.

As readers likely anticipate, participants employed group discussion, as well as personal journal writing. Yvette fostered class discussion about board games by asking what ideas and assumptions shape how *Monopoly* is played. To encourage alternative gameplay, she asked students to consider:

> What kinds of 'fun' are derived from playing? Does [fun] apply to all players? Could it? Should all players play by the same set of rules? What makes the game 'fair'? Fair for whom? … What if everyone could win? How would that work?

In this way, Yvette's project promoted reflexivity about the kind of world board games configure – including those designed by students – and about who could participate in that world, keeping in mind the ethics of inclusion. Yvette employed journal writing as well as group discussion, "so that if there were sentiments they didn't feel comfortable sharing orally, they had an option of writing them down".

Natalie introduced "social identities" to launch her project, attending to gender stereotypes that support inequality. To initiate class discussion, students watched clips from the documentary *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (Picker, 2002). Turning to a discussion of racial and gender stereotyping in Disney, Natalie acknowledged the affective investment that many students have in pop culture. Sharing her own responses, Natalie reminded students that examining something critically "does not mean you cannot enjoy it, just that you are looking more deeply". For homework, students wrote personal journal entries reflecting on their responses to what they viewed. This activity enabled Natalie to later ask the class to

[8] None of the teacher participants taught "media studies" as a subject area.

[9] Amy explained "hail" through the analogy of "hailing a cab." If we are successful in our hail, the driver responds as the subject being addressed.

think about the stereotypes they had used in their own work.

Amy's project also explored the role of "identity" in media engagement, in her case drawing on the personal identities of participants. She asked the girls to:

> list 5-10 words that you think might describe YOU from an outsider's point of view – i.e. how might someone describe you who didn't actually know you, but could only guess based on your age, your size, your look/hair/makeup, race/ethnicity, your clothing style, your friends, your musical tastes, etc.

These reflections became the basis for interrogating how advertising texts "spoke" to them as readers based on specific identity characteristics. By analyzing ads as embodied viewers, the girls became aware of how a specific "womanhood" is constructed (and "sold") by advertisers, sparking their interest in feminism. This outcome illustrates how political reflexivity can be fostered when learners connect messaging to their lived experience.

When asking students for personal responses, it is significant that teachers were willing to share their own feelings and values. Amy shared her experience, when pregnant, of being hailed by advertising in the magazine, *Fit Pregnancy*. Her analysis revealed the targeted reader as someone who is pregnant, concerned about their health, and potentially worried – therefore likely to purchase advertised products. Amy demonstrated how she redesigned the magazine cover to eliminate "fear" and instead convey her feelings and values about pregnancy. We cannot help but feel that Amy's willingness to share her media responses accounts, in part, for girls' eagerness to openly discuss how ads successfully hailed them, despite their conscious criticism of commercial culture. Inspired by Amy's example, girls redesigned ads to express meanings for "womanhood" that resonated with their personal identities as young, racialized women.

Peer feedback was central to all three cases, taking a number of forms. To encourage feedback Yvette invited a Grade 6 class to try out her students' board games. The spontaneous discussions that emerged gave her students an opportunity to reflect on changes that would make their games relevant to a more diverse audience. Peer feedback stimulated reflexive consideration by students of the values, motivations, and purposes guiding their media production. It enabled Yvette's students to experience how their games engage specific players, but exclude others. At the same time, by giving feedback students participated in the process of "rating" media while considering inclusivity and fairness. In their own way, each project provided a context within which youth could reflexively interrogate the power of media to shape reader responses.

Modes of reflexivity

Experiencing the social power of media engagement is a first step toward encouraging responsible media use. In the activities above, students analyzed media texts as exercising "power over" them as readers, but also exercised their power to resist and challenge messaging, individually or with others (see Allen 1999/2018). As our study unfolded, we developed a typology of student reflexivity. While we distinguish discrete "modes" of reflexivity for analytical purposes, in practice these modes are not mutually exclusive. The six modes that comprise our typology reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of evaluation. Together they map the power of media to shape not only the social world, but also our understanding of it. Our typology therefore takes CML beyond simply assessing the veracity of media messaging, in order to explore how this messaging works as a venue for the operation of power.

Personal reflexivity explores how we are invested in media activities because of our individual identity and social experiences. By interrogating how media engagement is implicated in "who we are" and "what we believe", personal reflexivity can promote critical reflection on one's attitudes, values, and beliefs, and consideration of how they are embedded in our media practices. Kahne and Bowyer (2017) found that youth tended to rate posts as "accurate" when these posts aligned with their personal views on the issue, irrespective of whether the post contained factual inaccuracies. Acknowledgement of personal values and beliefs can help students recognize their own "motivated reasoning" or how "confirmation bias" prevents them from considering new information or viewpoints.

Personal reflexivity also promotes *affective reflexivity* by encouraging reflection on emotional investments one holds in their personal values and world view. By naming and interrogating our responses to media we encounter, commitments we hold toward the meaning constructed by our own text can also be identified. The role of affect is double-edged; while it can be a barrier to self-critique, it can also push learners to question what they encounter. The resulting unpredictability highlights the need for teachers themselves to practice reflexivity (see Kelly & Currie, 2021).

Table 1. *Student reflexivity during media engagement*

Modes of reflexivity	Sample questions
Personal	*For individual media engagement:* • Why have I constructed this text or decided to share it? With whom? Why? • What does this text say about me? Does it reflect my beliefs and values? • How does my personal identity shape media I produce or engage with? *For collaborative media engagement:* • What other viewpoints surfaced? How did I respond to viewpoints that contradicted mine? Why? • Did my responses silence others, or did they encourage others? • What have I learned from the exchange of views?
Affective	*For individual media engagement:* • How does this text make me feel? Why? • What emotional investment do I have in producing/sharing this text? • How might others respond to this text? • What emotional investment do I have in responses by others to this text? Why? *For collaborative media engagement:* • What emotional exchanges, if any, among group members or in response to audience members occurred? Can we name the emotions? • Did the exchange prompt me, or members of my group, to reconsider positions or opinions? How?
Evidentiary	*For individual or collaborative media engagement:* • Is this message an expression of opinion, or is it based on something factual? • If factual, what kind of evidence is presented? How current is the information? Where does it come from? Can it be checked? How? • Whose interests are being served by how facts are presented? Who could be harmed? • If based on personal experience, is this experience shared by others? Who? • Can the evidence presented be interpreted in another way? How? What difference might an alternative interpretation make?
Analytical	*For individual or collaborative media engagement:* • What kind of world does the text construct? What kind of social values are promoted? • What categories and language are used to construct this world? How do they address a specific audience? • What difference does choice of language make in terms of the meaning that could be constructed by different readers? • Are there alternative ways to express my/our intended message? Should I/we use them (or not)? • Do each of us, individually and across our group, feel that the social groups we belong to are represented or missing? What do they tell us about intentions behind this text?
Ethical	*For individual media engagement:* • Does the text support a particular group or marginalize a particular group? A particular person? • Will my text offend anyone? Who? Why? Should/can I prevent such a response? How? • Does my text promote stereotypes? What alternative messaging can I use? • Does my text valorize or devalue the experience of others? *For collaborative media engagement:* • Did all group members have equal opportunities to have their ideas expressed? • Did different readings by different members make us aware of harmful meanings we had not noticed? • How was our message perceived by others? What impact did our text have on them? How did we respond?
Political	*For individual or collaborative media engagement:* • What kind of actions or inactions are promoted by messages, both intended and unintended? • Does the message challenge what I/we believe to be unfair? What kind of action /inaction does it encourage? • How might people from diverse backgrounds engage with the text? Does the text support a particular group or marginalize a particular group? A particular person? What are the consequences of missing voices? • How might I /we change our text to enhance its relevance to diverse people?

Evidentiary reflexivity questions whether messaging is an expression of opinion, or is based on verifiable facts. It invites consideration of what one knows from other sources, including lived experience. Evidentiary reflexivity can also encourage *analytical reflexivity,* by asking whether the text is inviting a response based on its emotional appeal. By interrogating how categories of meaning (for example, those associated with stereotyping) support such responses, analytical reflexivity can support *ethical reflexivity* that considers how you treat other people, whom you pay attention to, and whom you ignore. Because it requires students to

anticipate responses their text might elicit from others, it gives them the opportunity to reconsider their message.

As noted above, informed judgment can be enhanced when students work collaboratively, by helping them "see things from many sides". Sharing can bring relevance to social issues not experienced by all students (for example, sexism and racism), laying the ground for *political reflexivity* that considers what kinds of actions are invited by the text. Political reflexivity connects media literacy to social change that can promote a more inclusive and equitable future. Following Gee (2011a), the politics of media engagement include the distribution of valued social goods – such as status – through practices of "liking" or sharing posts. Reflexive interrogation of these practices draws attention to media engagement as shaping the world we live in.

There is much more we could draw from our data. While we briefly illustrated how reflexivity played out in actual classrooms during our study, in Table 1 we offer a typology of student reflexivity, along with examples of prompting questions. Our sample questions are meant to enhance judgment about the media students create, what they decide to post online, how they respond to the online posts of others, and what they decide to share online or to ignore. They encourage evaluation of media texts based on how these texts participate in the ongoing re/constitution of social reality, rather than simply prompt critique of isolated texts.

The point is to evaluate not only already given messaging, but also one's own media practices, ideally exercising judgment within a timeframe where "it is still possible to make a difference to the outcomes of action" (Schön, 1995, p. 30). Once a habit of mind, reflexive interrogation is a practice that is not teacher dependent and is adaptable to personal growth.

This paper identifies six social domains in which this power operates, each associated with a mode of reflexive interrogation that promotes informed decision making. In the place of simply determining the validity of media messaging, reflexive interrogation supports informed decision making about the messaging youth create, endorse, share, or challenge.

By connecting media engagement to its material consequences, our modes of reflexivity encourage students to consider how their media practices can help create the kind of world they want to live in.

CONCLUSION

The context of this paper is the emergence of fake news and spread of misinformation, both undermining confidence in digital information. As noted by boyd (2014), "In a networked world, in which fewer intermediaries control the flow of information and more information is flowing, the ability to critically question information or media narratives is increasingly important" (p. 181). On the surface, fact checking rubrics offer a way forward. We have argued, however, that they are insufficient to address fake news/misinformation as a *social* problem that cannot be corrected if the "facts of the matter" are simply settled. We agree with Mason et al. (2018) that:

> If fake news is simply treated as an add-on to an existing media literacy curriculum, teachers will merely create exercises that will help students determine whether a particular story can be considered fake or not. While this would be useful, it does not begin to address the reasons why the phenomenon of fake news has arisen within the culture in recent years. (p. 7)

Our approach attributes fake news and the spread of misinformation to power operating through – not *as* – media. The power operating through media originates in distinctly social practices, enabled by control over the production and dissemination of media messaging. We offer critical social literacy as an approach to CML based on this understanding of the operation of power. It treats literacy as simultaneously a practice of consumption and production through which social reality is brought into existence.

By analyzing how power works through media as the intentional orchestration of human activities, youth can recognize media engagement as part of the process through which the social world is accomplished. The goal is to foster student awareness of their own media practices (whether consuming, producing, or disseminating media texts) as helping to shape the reality they experience. Critical social literacy prepares youth to exercise informed judgment about promoting the kind of world they want to live in; we therefore developed CSL for educators intending to use media to promote social justice. This paper identified six modes of student reflexivity that support informed judgment, and that can be prompted by teachers using lines of questioning that draw attention to the distinctly social nature of media engagement. Drawing on our research with teachers, we illustrated how such reflexivity might be fostered as both an individual and a collaborative activity.

While media literacy is a necessary part of the solution, we do not advance it as a panacea for the problem of fake news and deliberate spread of misinformation. Media literacy does not take place in conditions under the control of educators. As noted by de Roock (2020): "Several decades into the internet revolution, digital technologies have neither leveled the educational playing field nor opened up democratic possibilities as they once were expected to" (p. 4; also see Schafer, 2011). An account of the social and material conditions that promote the spread of misinformation – but at the same time make criticisms of it possible – is beyond the scope of the current venue. An emerging literature is beginning to include these conditions as a necessary component of CML (see Bakir & McStay, 2018; Buckingham, 2019; de Roock, 2020; Kohnen et al., 2020; Mason, Krutka & Stoddart, 2018; Pangrazio, 2018). Like Kress (2018, p. 454), we would not presume to know what this new paradigm will look like. By directing attention to social relations and practices responsible for the production and dissemination of media, it is our hope the CSL will help orient CML towards media engagement that supports deliberative public dialogue.

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