

Preparing English Teachers With Critical Media Literacy for the Digital Age

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This work addresses the potential for English teachers to prepare their students for the literacy requirements of the digital age. The authors reviewed the literature about media education and teacher preparation, focusing on the need for students to think critically about the information, technology, and media they interact with daily. Based on the authors' experiences teaching a critical media literacy course in a university teacher education program, they designed a survey for former students to comment on their successes and struggles in bringing the ideas from the course to their K-12 students. Through this online survey, secondary English teachers and elementary teachers were questioned about the critical media literacy teaching they had been doing with their students. An exemplar secondary English teacher who regularly incorporates critical media literacy into her instruction was also interviewed. The data from the literature, surveys, and interview provide examples of the potential English teachers have to teach *with* and *about* media and to analyze media critically.

English teachers are needed more today than ever before. With over half the world's population connected to the Internet (Internet Live Stats, 2019) and 95% of US teenagers having access to smartphones (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), English teachers play an essential role in helping students make sense of the boundless amounts of information they encounter, use, and share.

The goals of the English teacher have long been to help students learn to read and write, to engage with the world through literature, and to understand the importance of literacy. While these objectives are still important, the challenges to create literate citizens have increased as students are engaging with new types of texts and information that are often decontextualized, commercial, false, and misleading. Today's dominant information communication technologies (ICTs) are digital, multimodal, and globally networked.

The potential for these new tools of communication to improve societies around the globe is tremendous, but so is the risk for them to be used to control, oppress, mislead, spread hate, and cause harm. Because of this potential for positive effects or negative consequences, English teachers need to understand what makes electronic communication unique and how to teach their students to think critically about all information.

Digital reading and writing require many of the same skills as traditional print-based literacy, yet when reading and writing are digital and networked, important dimensions change. Digital texts gain new potential to be *multimodal* (combining different formats), *hyperlinked* (connecting with other media and building new relationships), and *interactive* (allowing for sharing, remixing, and participation) (Beach, 2009). Digital reading and writing do not occur in isolation; they are embedded in mediated environments and networked publics that have unique qualities, especially in relation to issues of persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability (boyd, 2014). As the technology makes it easier and faster to spread fake news and create so-called “alternative facts,” the challenge to judge credibility and bias of information becomes more difficult.

In order for English teachers to prepare their students for the literacy demands of the 21st century, they need a critical framework and pedagogical practices that engage with the ever-evolving information, media, popular culture, and technology. Few teacher education programs are preparing new teachers in this way, even though recognition of this need is growing (Hobbs, 2007; Kirwan, Learmonth, Sayer, & Williams, 2003; Tiede, Grafe, & Hobbs, 2015; Wilson & Duncan, 2009).

Tiede et al. (2015) researched 316 US public educational institutions that provide teacher training and 64 universities or colleges of teacher education in Germany, concluding that few offer more than media didactics (basic educational technology that teaches *with* media, not *about* media). From their data in the United States, they reported, “Media education, with emphasis on the instructional practices associated with the critical evaluation of media, culture, and society, were scarce, representing only 2% of all study programs in teacher training programs” (pp. 540-541). To meet the current needs of preparing educators to teach their students critical literacy skills with and about all types of media and information, we created a critical media literacy course for preservice teachers.

Critical Media Literacy in Teacher Education

The overarching goal of this critical media literacy (CML) course was to transform education to critically analyze and use media, popular culture, and technology for social and environmental justice. We helped design and teach this course to in-service and preservice teachers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). One of the authors (Share) brought together his experience working first as a photojournalist and later as an elementary school teacher to create a course that could combine critiques of our mediated society with transformative pedagogy. The other author (Mamikonyan) comes from a communication studies background and has taught media and culture undergraduate courses while continuing to focus her research on social justice teacher education.

Both authors believe in the importance of interrogating the role media play in often reproducing dominant ideologies and misleading audiences, while also valuing the

positive contributions media provide to inform, empower, and entertain. Through combining theory from cultural studies and critical pedagogy with practical classroom applications of digital media and technology, this course attempts to prepare K-12 educators to teach their students how to critically analyze and create various types of media texts.

The course began as an optional elective for master's level students in the teacher education program. After 2 years of successful implementation and positive feedback from the students, in 2011 it was officially approved by the university and became a required class for all UCLA students earning their teaching credential.

The course heightens awareness about our relationships with media and technology, it teaches skills to analyze and create a variety of texts and promotes dispositions to engage critically with the mediated world. Starting with a theoretical overview, the course explores the development of media education that is defined, less as a specific body of knowledge or set of skills, and more as a framework of conceptual understandings (Buckingham, 2003).

In his *media education manifesto*, David Buckingham (2019) explained that the critical concepts of media education include interrogating media language about codes and conventions, exploring how media represent reality, questioning the role of the audience in decoding, using, and being used by media, and unpacking the motives behind the production of media. Buckingham stated that the purpose of a conceptual framework is to enable students “to ask their own questions, and to reflect on their own interpretations and experiences of media in a systematic and rigorous way” (p. 64). Creating the systems and rigor to support this type of educational inquiry have been core goals of the course that derive from the CML conceptual framework (see Table 1).

Much of the theory that informs the CML framework has evolved from cultural studies, a field of critical inquiry that began in the 20th century in Europe and continues to grow with new critiques of media and society. Kellner (1995) explained that cultural studies has developed to integrate concepts of semiotics, feminism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism. Incorporating an understanding of political economy, textual analysis, and audience theory, cultural studies critiques media culture as dynamic discourses that reproduce dominant ideologies as well as entertain, educate, and offer possibilities for counterhegemonic alternatives (Hammer & Kellner, 2009).

To provide a critical and pragmatic path to teaching in K-12 classrooms, these conceptual understandings are taught through a democratic pedagogical approach that shifts the role of the teacher to more of a facilitator of learning, rather than the expert depositing knowledge as in the traditional banking method (Freire, 2010). Prensky (2010) referred to this approach as “partnering pedagogy” and suggested that the 21st century requires inquiry-based learning and a change in the conventional roles that students and teachers have played. The teacher should be less of the expert calling the shots and more the facilitator, guide, or coach while students become active researchers and “world changers” (p. 20). This democratic pedagogy follows the traditions of Socrates’ dialectical approach of thoughtful questioning, John Dewey’s (1916/1997) ideas of hands-on experiential learning, and Paulo Freire’s (2010) call to replace banking education with problem-posing pedagogy.

The CML course incorporates feminist theory and critical pedagogy to analyze relationships between media and audiences as well as information and power (Carlson, Share, & Lee, 2013; Garcia, Seglem, & Share, 2013). Feminist standpoint theory offers an important theoretical lens for critical media literacy because it explains how beginning inquiry from a subordinate position can increase the likelihood of seeing the dominant ideology (Harding, 2004).

From studying the ideological structures of patriarchy, many feminist theorists, like Patricia Hill-Collins, developed feminist standpoint epistemologies (Harding, 2004) that can be useful for critical media literacy. Privileges and dominance create blind spots, making it more difficult for those benefiting from oppression to see the structures and ideologies that oppress others. At the same time, people with fewer privileges who have lived and experienced the effects of racism, sexism, classism, and other systemic forms of oppression are more likely to recognize the problems and be able to see the harmful structures.

Standpoint theory is about studying up, beginning inquiry from marginalized positions to increase the likelihood of seeing the larger social structures that often become obscured by hegemonic ideologies. While people who experience oppression have greater potential for recognizing the structures of oppression, critical consciousness is not automatic. Feminist standpoint theorists assert that “the vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for...” (Hartsock, 1997, p. 153). In teaching the CML class, students are guided to search for the marginalized positions and ask who is benefiting and who is being harmed by the media message.

Transformative education requires a critical pedagogy in which empathy and compassion help students understand the ways people are interconnected through systems of dominance and subordination (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Freire, 2010). Critical media literacy that combines critical pedagogy with standpoint epistemologies can offer an approach to help all students see the structures of oppression, analyze the role of ideology in shrouding those structures, and find agency in the act of becoming subjects who can express their voices to challenge racism, sexism, classism, and all forms of oppression.

To emphasize the critical potential of these ideas, while providing an accessible tool for teachers to use in the classroom, the following CML framework is used with six conceptual understandings and questions shown in Table 1 (Kellner & Share, 2019). This is a framework that UCLA researchers constructed based on decades of work from cultural studies scholars and media educators around the globe, such as the British Film Institute’s Signpost Questions, Canada’s Ontario Ministry of Education’s Eight Key Concepts, and the U.S. Center for Media Literacy’s Five Core Concepts (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Table 1
Critical Media Literacy Framework

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

The CML framework is designed to help teachers and their students question the role of power and ideology that socialize and control society through making some people and ideas seem “normal” and “natural” while the rest are “othered” and

“marginalized” (Hall, 2003). Teacher candidates analyze and discuss current media texts, while learning how to use various social media and digital tools to create their own media with alternative counterhegemonic representations. Using an inquiry process and democratic pedagogy, problems are posed to the students to collaboratively wrestle with, unpack, and respond to through discussion and media production.

Critical media literacy promotes an expansion of the understanding of literacy to include many types of texts, such as images, music, videos, social media, advertising, popular culture, and print. English teachers can have their students read movies, songs, and video games as complex texts worthy of analysis and critique. The expansion of literacy includes students creating media to express themselves through visual images, sounds, and multimedia productions. Along with expanding literacy to engage with more types of texts, CML deepens critical analysis to explore the connections between information and power.

In this digital, networked media age, teaching students how to read and write only with print is not enough while their world has moved far beyond letters on a page. Literacy education in the 21st century requires breaking from the limitations of traditional print-based practices to include all the varied ways people communicate with media, technology, and any tool that facilitates the transfer of information or connects people. This new era calls for new skills and understandings to decode and analyze, as well as to create and produce, all types of texts.

The California Teaching Performance Expectations also require teacher education programs to expand their understanding of literacy and integrate media and technology into coursework to, “deepen teaching and learning to provide students with opportunities to participate in a digital society and economy” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016, p. 9). These expectations are now common in most Common Core State Standards and educational organizations, such as the International Literacy Association, which defines literacy as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context” (International Literacy Association, n.d.).

The ideals of CML can also be seen in a resolution formally approved by the executive committee of the National Council of Teachers of English (2019), declaring that they

promote pedagogy and scholarly curricula in English and related subjects that instruct students in civic and critical literacy, going beyond basic reading comprehension to the thinking skills that enable students to analyze and evaluate sophisticated persuasive techniques in all texts, genres, and types of media, current and yet to be imagined. (Resolution section, first point)

The CML course at UCLA begins each class by reviewing and applying the conceptual understandings and questions (see Table 1). We encourage students to analyze as well as produce media, since literacy includes reading and writing all types of texts (Redmond, 2019). A series of assignments require teacher candidates to work together to create a variety of media projects, such as wanted posters, photographs, podcasts, memes, digital stories, social media, and advertisements (for a more detailed description of the course see Kellner & Share, 2019). The

candidates are expected to work collaboratively on a CML lesson plan (a learning segment that they write), present a summary to the whole class, and when possible, teach it to their K-12 students.

One of the goals of the CML course is to encourage teachers to integrate different types of media into their teaching, such as using photography to illustrate vocabulary words or creating podcasts to tell stories. One example from the CML class is a lesson in which students have to take photographs in teams to illustrate a vocabulary word. The photography lesson begins with a comparison of two distinctly different photographs of the same person. Through a whole group discussion, the class deconstructs the techniques that the photographers used to create the two images. Students' ideas are charted on the board, and this list becomes the visual literacy skills they are expected to use when taking their photographs (Share, 2015).

Students then leave the classroom in teams to create a single photograph that will communicate their assigned vocabulary word. After taking their pictures, they choose one image that is projected for the entire class to view, and the class attempts to guess the vocabulary word.

Throughout the process, students are encouraged to be metacognitive about their learning and reflect on the conceptual understandings of the CML framework. By posing guiding questions, instructors can facilitate reflection to help students connect the dots between the photography activity and the CML conceptual understandings.

For example, Concept 1, the process they engaged in to create the photographs demonstrates how media messages are socially constructed; Concept 2, the techniques of photography they used are the codes and conventions of visual language; Concept 3, the variety of responses to each other's photographs shows how audiences can read the same message differently; Concept 4, their choices of *what* to photograph and *how* to take the pictures are influenced by their positionalities and contribute to the bias of the photographs; Concept 5, everyone's photograph had a clear purpose since the task required that they illustrate a specific vocabulary word; and Concept 6, each photograph they took required students to consider if they were possibly perpetuating a stereotype or creating an image that could have a negative effect.

A similar process of analysis, production, and reflection is conducted for most lessons in the CML course. Before students create podcasts, they explore the four elements of sound used in movies: dialogue, narration, music, and sound effects. Student teams experiment with these elements, as each group creates a simple radio theater with the same seven lines of dialogue (as found in Shamburg, 2009).

After that introductory activity, students use their cell phones to record a podcast about content that matters to them in one of many radio genres: talk show, sporting event, news story, weather report, song, advertisement, infomercial, traffic report, and so forth. This lesson provides students the opportunity to apply what they just learned about aural literacy and work collaboratively to create their podcasts, which also serve as an authentic form of assessment.

This activity is designed to be collaborative and student centered, since students choose their topic and have complete freedom to decide how to tell their story. The

collaborative creative process is highly engaging. Even university students often become caught up in the enjoyment and do not realize all they are learning. Similar to the photography activity, this lesson is used to analyze the learning process, since education should always value process over product.

The Study

As an exploratory study to assess *if* and *how* former students were applying the skills and knowledge gained from the CML course into their teaching practice, we created an online survey for the university students who had taken the course within the previous 5 years (Share, Mamikonyan, & Lopez, 2019). Through purposeful sampling, we sent out the survey to all of the 738 students who had taken the CML course. We ended up with 185 usable responses (25% response rate) – 153 preservice (they were earning their teaching credential and master’s degree at the time when they took the CML course) and 32 in-service teachers (they already had a teaching credential and were studying for their master’s degree when they attended the class).

Of the 185 respondents, 53 taught elementary school, and 132 were secondary level teachers. The breakdown of the middle school and high school teachers was as follows: 38 science, 34 math, 33 social sciences, 28 English, and several reported teaching a combination of subjects as well as some who taught other areas, such as music, visual arts, Spanish, English language development, or adult education. The span of experience was wide; some had just started teaching and some had been teaching for over 7 years, yet 52% of the teachers had been teaching between 2 and 3 years.

The mixed method survey included 20 questions. The first eight sought to identify participants’ teaching background. The remaining 12 questions inquired about their experiences teaching CML skills and concepts to their K-12 students. Ten questions used a Likert scale, with a choice of responses ranging from *very frequently*, *frequently*, *occasionally*, *rarely*, and *never*, as well as an option to choose *not applicable*. The final two questions were open ended, in which respondents could type their thoughts about any “memorable moment(s) teaching critical media literacy” and “any additional comments.” During the analysis phase, we found it helpful to combine the categories *very frequently* and *frequently* and refer to them as VF/F. Investigation of the statistical properties of the questionnaire was not the focus of this study, yet we do see consistency in the responses to the open-ended and close-ended items that provide evidence of reliability. Future studies could pursue deeper evaluation of the reliability and validity of the instrument.

Findings

The data generated from the surveys brought to light patterns in the ways English teachers had been engaging their students with critical media literacy. We separated the findings from elementary ($n = 53$) and secondary English teachers ($n = 28$) in order to analyze the similarities and differences from each group, since students’ developmental levels, teachers’ duties, and schools’ structures are so distinct. The main findings are broken into three categories that demonstrate a progression from just *using media in the classroom*, to *engaging in media analysis*, and ultimately to *thinking more critically* by analyzing the politics of representation and issues of power.

Secondary English Teachers

Using media in the classroom. In response to questions from the survey, the majority of the 28 secondary English teachers reported incorporating a variety of media into their class activities. Seventy-five percent reported using media VF/F as part of their class activities. Figure 1 lists the various types of media secondary English students created in their classrooms.

An in-service middle school teacher with 3 years of teaching experience wrote, “I had my English class create newspaper articles involving a novel they read. They loved using the online template, incorporating photos and text, etc.” Another middle school English teacher with at least 4 years of teaching experience shared how her students created a blog, noting, “It was powerful for them to see their work in print and made public.” The most common media used were visual displays, while podcasts were the least common.

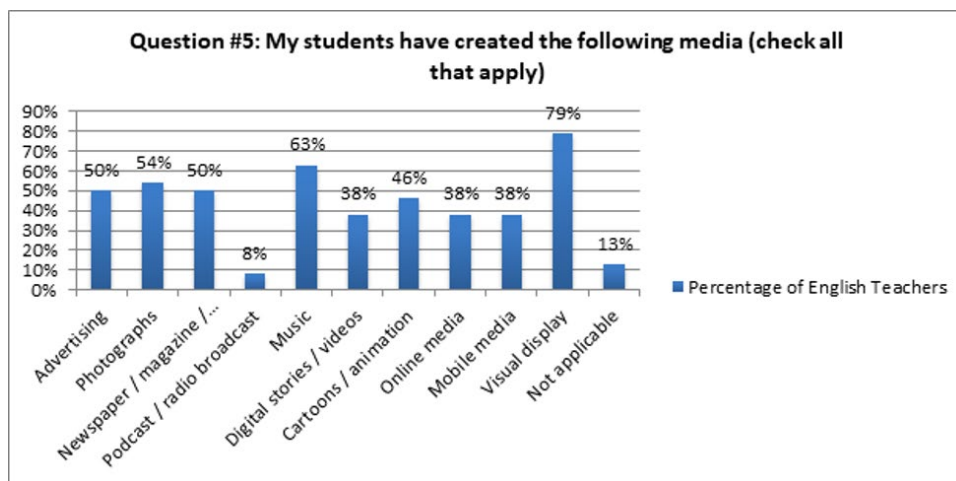


Figure 1. Question 5 - Secondary Students Media Use (n = 28).

Engaging in media analysis. In addition to incorporating different media in class activities and assignments, our data show that secondary English teachers provided many opportunities for their students to analyze media. Sixty-three percent reported VF/F giving students opportunities to engage in media analysis. Similarly, a high school teacher with more than 7 years of teaching experience wrote, “My students took pictures of advertisements that surrounded their neighborhood, and we analyzed them for patterns, themes and purposes.” A first-year high school teacher had her class look at “advertisements to understand propaganda.” Analyzing advertisements was a common response, suggesting that many teachers encouraged their students not simply to use and create media, but also to question and think critically about it.

Thinking more critically. When questioned about engaging their students in critical media analysis, such as exploring media representations of ideology, race, class, gender, sexuality, environmentalism, and connections between information and power, teachers reported less frequency. This decrease is not surprising since critical engagement is more involved. Even still, 33% of the secondary English teachers noted that they VF/F engaged in critical media analysis, and 50% occasionally did. A middle school in-service teacher with more than seven years of teaching experience explained,

I love seeing students critically engage with the media they are presented with and begin to ask questions and come to their own conclusions about media. The most memorable lesson I've taught involving critical media literacy was a unit based on perseverance and the power of the human spirit in regards to power structures and oppression. After analyzing multiple types of media students created their own VoiceThread using spoken word in order to share their own messages of perseverance. It was incredibly powerful to hear their messages.

A high school English teacher with at least 7 years of teaching experience shared how her students analyzed popular superhero comic books and “used the comic medium to tell an autobiographical story wherein they exhibited power in the face of oppression.”

In response to the question asking if CML encourages critical thinking among their students, 81% of secondary English teachers reported they believed it did VF/F. Considering that only about a third of these teachers reported teaching critical analysis, it is significant that they felt it so frequently encouraged critical thinking.

When it came to challenges, 45% of the teachers believed that their students rarely found the ideas of critical media literacy difficult to engage in, 30% occasionally, and 25% VF/F. Similarly, 17% of teachers indicated that CML was rarely difficult to incorporate into their teaching, 50% occasionally, and 33% reported VF/F.

More than half of the teachers indicated that the critical media literacy framework with conceptual understandings and questions were useful in their teaching. Last, more than half of the teachers (55%) VF/F indicated feeling supported by their school to incorporate critical media literacy, while only 25% reported rarely feeling supported to teach CML.

Elementary Teachers

Using media in the classroom. Of the 185 responses to the survey, 53 came from elementary teachers who are expected to teach all subjects, especially English language arts. Our data show that 65% of elementary teachers reported incorporating various media into their lessons VF/F. These teachers shared the types of media their students made, such as creating podcasts, videos, and virtual tours of their community, as well as recording audiobooks and taking pictures.

Figure 2 shows the percentages of various types of media created by students in the elementary classroom. The responses from the elementary teachers are similar to the results reported by the secondary English teachers, with visual displays being most popular at 55%. For the younger students, however, mobile media was least common at 8%.

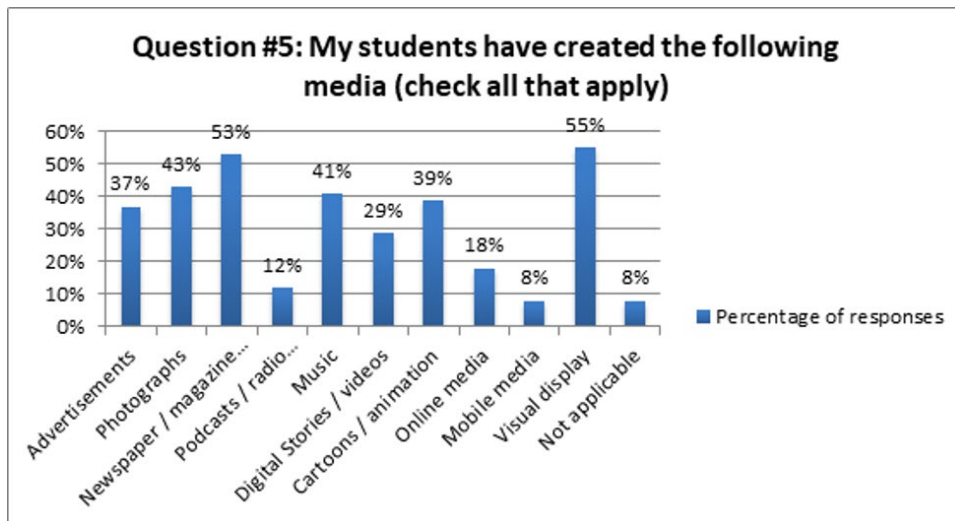


Figure 2. Question 5 - Elementary Students' Media Use (n = 53).

Engaging in media analysis. In addition to incorporating various types of media in the classroom, 31% of elementary teachers reported engaging in media analysis VF/F and 48%, occasionally. This result is significantly lower than the 63% of secondary English teachers who reported their students analyzed media VF/F and 21% occasionally.

A fifth-grade teacher noted that her students “seemed to have a healthy skepticism” when analyzing false health messages in advertising. Another elementary teacher mentioned engaging her students in media analysis by analyzing political ads: “Students were close reading a Trump Campaign Ad, and all of them were able to pull specific words that created a connotation within the 1-minute ad.”

Media analysis also included a debate involving the entire class. A third-grade teacher encouraged her students to analyze a wanted poster of Harriet Tubman: “They wrote their initial understanding of the poster and then critiqued one another's point of view through questioning and providing evidence that either supported or refuted claims made by their peers.”

Media analysis for early elementary students varied from questioning an author's point of view to differentiating what is true from what is made up. An in-service elementary teacher who has been teaching for over 4 years explained,

Though my students are younger and some of these concepts are more difficult to teach than others, I find it important to bring up, especially in terms of making sure they don't believe every "youtube" video they watch. We've had many meaningful discussions about what can be created for a video shouldn't just be accepted as the truth. For example, the "mermaid" documentary that came out a few years ago had all of my students convinced that they had found a mermaid. It led to an interesting discussion on hoaxes and further reading about Bigfoot[t] and other such stories.

Thinking more critically. In addition to incorporating many types of media and engaging students in media analysis, elementary teachers encouraged their

students to explore connections between information and power through analyzing media representations of ideology, race, class, gender, sexuality, and environmentalism. Elementary teachers again showed lower frequencies of teaching these connections than did the secondary English teachers, as 22% reported VF/F, 42% occasionally, and 27% rarely engaged their students in critical media analysis.

While the percentage of critical engagement in media analysis was lower for elementary levels, it is still significant to see this much critical engagement occurring with young children, since often adults assume young children are not capable of critical thinking. A kindergarten teacher noted,

I had my students analyze photographs from the civil rights movement. I teach kindergarten, and I think they needed much more scaffolding than I was prepared for, but two of my students really were inspired by looking at which groups of people were represented, who created the image, etc.

Two teachers shared how discussions about gender made an impact on their students. One wrote, “My students showed greater acceptance. After teaching a lesson invoking gender, all my male students felt accepted to choose any color paper – the favorite was pink for the rest of the year.” Another elementary teacher noted, “We've had some successful discussions around gender stereotypes, and I've heard the language change in the classroom and students be more thoughtful about others' choices.” Elementary teachers overwhelmingly responded that engaging in critical media literacy encouraged critical thinking among their students (78% VF/F). One teacher noted, “My students analyzed food justice issues in my class. They were instantly engaged, and students who had a difficult time writing and with critical thinking then, did not.” These comments align with the notion that critical literacy is “a way of being through which to participate in the world in and outside of school” (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019).

While some teachers might underestimate elementary students' capacity to engage in critical media literacy, only 12% of the elementary teachers indicated VF/F that their students found CML difficult to engage in, 44% occasionally, 24% rarely, and 8% never. When the elementary teachers were asked if they found incorporating CML into their teaching to be difficult, 26% responded that they found it difficult VF/F, 47% occasionally, 23% rarely, and 3% never. Just as with the secondary English teachers, over half of the elementary teachers in the study found the media literacy framework of conceptual understandings and questions useful in their teaching.

Last, the data revealed that 37% of elementary teachers felt supported teaching CML VF/F, 29% indicated that they occasionally felt supported, 19% rarely, and 6% never. One elementary teacher wrote, “My admin is reluctant to have me teach how to be critical of all media.” Since CML is still a relatively unknown subject, administrators should also be learning about the value of critically engaging students with and about media.

Aside from administrative support, some teachers expressed their intention to incorporate CML or media analysis. A kindergarten teacher who had been teaching for up to 6 years stated,

I wish I had more time to engage my students in this topic. As I grow in experience and expertise, I incorporate it more and more. Teaching in urban areas is a challenge, but I do find the ideas of the course to be valuable in the classroom.

Another elementary teacher with 2-3 years of teaching experience wrote,

CML is something that I found extremely valuable. As a new teacher adapting to everything, I admit that it has been challenging to fit CML into my teaching, however it is a much stronger goal of mine this year, and everything I learned will be valuable for that.

One More Voice

To gain additional insight about challenges and successes of teaching CML in an English classroom, we conducted a follow-up 1-hour interview with Araz Keshishian, an exemplar eighth-grade English teacher who took the CML class in 2013 while teaching full-time and working on her master's degree. We chose to interview her as an example of what is possible, since she has done such exceptional work teaching CML since graduating.

Keshishian has been teaching for 12 years and believes that the CML course had a significant impact on her teaching practice. She identified close parallels between teaching reading comprehension and analyzing a piece of literature with the critical media literacy framework. Keshishian explained that CML enhances her teaching:

Out of all the classes that I have ever taken, out of tons of professional development (I am in a Title 1 school, and we get a lot of professional development), nothing has changed my teaching and my outlook more than the CML class....That's the one class that flipped my perspective and made me a completely different teacher.

She explained that in an English class, character analysis looks at how the author uses action, dialogue, and character description to frame the character for the reader, in the same way a photographer for a magazine uses camera angles, lighting, and colors to portray a person in a specific way. In her class, she discusses how those who create media texts or literature have the power to tell a story based on what they choose to show and what they choose to leave out.

To understand how messages are constructed, she assigns her students to analyze a fictional character from a novel, a historical figure (looking at how they have been framed in history books), and a person relevant at the moment (including a politician or a celebrity). Then, they are tasked to write a personal analysis of themselves (thinking about how they would be framed or perceived if someone were writing an article or a book about them). This assignment requires students to analyze a fictional character, a historical character, a current person, and themselves, while realizing that their capacity to know about someone or something is always influenced by contextual factors and the bias of whoever tells the story.

Keshishian has found that critical media literacy is accessible to most students, especially students who struggle in conventional English classes. She explained

that media are relevant in students' lives. Students are familiar with and interested in media, which makes it easier to apply the same strategies for reading comprehension to media texts. For these reasons, she incorporates social media in her lessons.

Keshishian stated, "Social media is sacred to them. It's such a big part of their lives. Talking about social media is hitting very close to home." She compared Instagram profiles to advertising: "What you see isn't always the whole picture." She asks her students to think about what is most important, having a good time when they are out with their friends or making it look like they are having a good time on social media? Most of her students admit to having posted something online that did not reflect their reality.

Since social media often perpetuate the illusion that everyone else is living wonderful lives, much like advertisements, students can benefit greatly from exploring the politics of representation. Middle school students are especially vulnerable to social pressures, and low socioeconomic students may feel that everything is stacked against them, making them even more alienated by distorted social media messages. Media are so ingrained in her students' identity, she asserted, that "for them, taking a look at media with a critical eye is just like taking a look at their lives with a critical eye."

Discussions about social media often lead to the topic of online surveillance. Many of Keshishian's students express that they are not doing anything wrong and, therefore, do not care about being surveilled. Her goal is to emphasize that surveillance is not about finding someone in the act of doing something wrong. "It's about them taking your preferences to market to you, to shape the person you become, giving you certain views that will appeal to you." As a class, students compare how different their homepage or Yahoo news looks based on the information that has been mined about them. She noted that it is eye opening for her students.

Keshishian emphasized the significance of media production in all her units.

I feel like that's really the most important piece. Once you are finished with the teaching part of it, you kind of give them the reins, like, you also have the same power to create media literature.... They don't have any special credential but have the power to create and share their work.

One such assignment involved creating media to advocate or oppose a school day off on Columbus Day to the school board. She coordinated with the history teacher, who taught a lesson on Columbus, and in English class they created media to further their understanding.

Incorporating critical media literacy has changed her teaching and increased student engagement by making learning relevant and critical. Keshishian remembered teaching CML only during certain units as a new teacher, but now it is woven into her entire curriculum. Every lesson plan now incorporates a critical media analysis: "A lesson isn't complete without incorporating some kind of CML," she said.

Conclusion

After analyzing the survey results, the interview with Keshishian, and the literature about critical media literacy, we found that CML is not only possible for elementary and secondary English teachers to integrate into their instruction, but it is essential for their students who are immersed in this media culture 24/7. The first step in this process is to teach *with* media, using photography, music, social media, and a variety of information communication technologies.

The majority of English teachers in our study reported *using media* VF/F – 75% of secondary English teachers and 65% of elementary teachers. When it came to teaching *about* media, the numbers slipped a little, but are still substantial; 63% of secondary English teachers reported having their students *analyzing media* VF/F and 21% occasionally, while 31% of elementary teachers reported engaging VF/F in media analysis and 48% occasionally.

Teachers should use the CML framework to plan their lessons and encourage their students to engage with the CML questions about the media they are reading, listening to, and watching to guide their analysis. The conceptual understandings provide guidance and direction to help the teacher target the objective of the learning. The questions that align with the concepts are intended to guide students' exploration and direct their inquiries toward critical engagement and deep understanding. The questions are not etched in stone and should be rewritten and modified when necessary to meet the learning needs of the students. Making them culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate is essential.

When participants were asked about analyzing media critically to address questions of power and ideology, the numbers dropped more significantly, especially for elementary teachers. This result is not surprising because critical engagement with social justice issues can be challenging. Yet, 33% of secondary English teachers reported analyzing media in this way VF/F and 50% occasionally. Elementary teachers reported 22% VF/F and 42% occasionally having their students explore media representations of ideology, race, class, gender, environmentalism, or other social injustices.

This type of critical engagement can be risky for teachers and students, as it requires trust and courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006). While stakes are higher, they are worth the challenge because asking critical questions about issues of power and injustice are essential for the path toward critical civic empathy (Mirra, 2018). The struggles and successes of these teachers emphasize the need for critical media literacy in teacher education programs and support for teachers in the schools to engage their students critically with issues that matter.

One of the tools that is used in the CML class that can be helpful for teachers anywhere is the website of free resources maintain by UCLA (<https://guides.library.ucla.edu/educ466>). This website is updated regularly and provides links to lesson plans, videos, podcasts, articles, and a treasure trove of resources for teaching critical media literacy.

The survey data from the teachers who took the CML course provide various examples of ways teachers are applying the ideas they learned with their students to increase the types of texts they use, analyze, and create. The challenge for schools of education is to prepare teachers with the information, skills, and critical

dispositions to read and write the word and world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Critical media literacy offers the theoretical framework and critical pedagogy necessary to begin this journey to better prepare teachers for the literacy demands of today and tomorrow.

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