Investigating Pre-Service Teachers' Understandings of Critical Media Literacy

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Abstract

This paper examines pre-service teachers' understandings of critical media literacy as they designed critical media literacy lessons in an initial teacher education language and literacy course for K-6 teachers. The teachers reflected on their initial understandings about social justice, designed several pre-tasks, designed and taught critical media literacy lessons, and then reflected on teaching critical media literacy to elementary school students. The results of this two-year study indicate that while the pre-service teachers seemed willing to address social justice issues and they used digital literacies in interesting and engaging ways, some of them faced challenges articulating and focusing their own understandings in media literacy lessons.

Introduction: New Times, New Challenges for Pre-Service Teachers

In this research we examine pre-service teachers' understandings of critical media literacy. Pre-service teachers face a dual challenge when engaging with critical literacy: as new teachers they are becoming aware of critical literacy, media literacy, and social justice issues in education; and they are also grappling with how to prepare their future students to become critically aware (Flores-Koulish, 2006). In our language arts teacher education courses we seek to help pre-service teachers learn how to navigate a media-rich world, and also how to examine it carefully. We hope that pre-service teachers will learn how to teach students to navigate media and also work toward recognizing bias and stereotypes that minimize students' life opportunities.

There is a scarcity of research about Canadian teachers and critical media literacy education initiatives, and even less research available on critical media literacy and pre-service teacher education in Canada. The research presented here is intended to provide some insights into how pre-service teachers understand critical media literacy concepts and how these understandings translate into their written lesson plans. Through this research we hope to inform our own practice as instructors of an elementary language arts course and invite interested others into a conversation about engaging pre-service teachers in critical pedagogy.

We help pre-service teachers come to terms with the complexity of critical media literacy by asking them to design and teach critical media literacy lessons for elementary

students. This is the third assignment in a four-month semester. The first two assignments, a digital story and a social justice book talk (see Hughes & Robertson, this issue) encourage pre-service teachers to think of themselves as change agents and consider how they can make a difference as teachers. The same philosophy is followed for the third assignment which has two components. First pre-service teachers design and then teach a critical media literacy lesson to K-6 students; second, they reflect on and debrief this teaching experience. Seventy-one pre-service teachers volunteered to participate in our study and fifteen volunteered to discuss their perspectives on critical media literacy pedagogy through individual interviews after teaching the critical media literacy lessons. These became rich data sources for our self-study.

Global, National and Provincial Contexts

There is a growing recognition of the importance of providing critical literacy education (Stevens & Bean, 2007) and critical media literacy education in schools (Flores-Koulish, 2006; Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007). We consider critical media literacy to be an educational imperative because media, popular culture and consumerism are ubiquitous and influential in the out-of-school lives of our students. Popular culture is not only entertainment but also a form of pedagogy. Critical media literacy skills help students interrogate, deconstruct, and uncover the layers of media messages. The following scenario, which describes an actual commercial, illustrates this point:

> A politician's ad leaves viewers with an impression that he is kind and experienced. As the ad is deconstructed however, you can see how voters are being positioned for this response. All of the candidate's constituents are males who are older, wider and shorter. Young females in the ad listen to him intently. An unconscious viewing of this ad suggests that the candidate is younger, thinner, wiser and taller than his peers. But an interrogation of who is missing reveals that no females are peers and the only constituents represented are older white males.

A deconstruction of this advertisement reveals assumptions about one gender and its presentation in a dependent role. Also present in this ad are the elements of the young and thin ideal. Both notions are apparent only through deconstruction. Critical media literacy helps students uncover underlying stereotypes and assumptions so that students can make more informed choices. Stevens and Bean (2007) see similar multiple purposes for critical literacy in schools: identity formation, privacy, and democratic citizenship. They suggest that critical literacy education can offer a "balance point" to counter global hegemonic forces (p.7) when texts persuade us to consume goods and to look a certain way.

Media present unique and unprecedented challenges for the current generation of students. When young people encounter a media ideal of thinness that is unnatural and unattainable for the general population, there is a need to help them deconstruct the message at the time of life when body image is becoming more important to them and there is a growing concern about their responses to it. For some students, body image

concerns emerge in the elementary grades (Holt & Ricciardelli, 2008; McVey, Tweed, & Blackmore, 2007). Another challenge presented by media is that students also need to understand how to protect their own privacy while participating in the shared web-spaces created by Web 2.0. Thirdly, students are using multiple forms of text that vary in authenticity and accuracy and there is a need for critical literacy approaches to help students filter text for "positionalities, agendas and purposes" (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p.17) so that children can question the author's interest. Students also need to learn to negotiate multiple literacies in order to be aware of "potential imbalances in agency and voice" (p. 25) and to participate in a democracy as literate citizens.

Despite the apparent need for skills in media literacy, there are, at present, few supports for teachers implementing critical media literacy. Kellner and Share (2007) argue that "media education in K-12 schooling in the United States has never really been established and developed" (p.4). According to Canada's Media Awareness Network, the level of awareness of media education has been raised in the past decade in Canada, but there is a call for faculties of education to include media education (Duncan, Pungente, & Andersen, 2002). Not all provinces have established media literacy outcomes as essential organizers (or strands) of curriculum, but some, such as Ontario, have dedicated a strand to media literacy student learning outcomes. Teachers are required to grade and report on the students' attainment of these outcomes. This raises the level of accountability for teachers without addressing the imperative of teacher professional development in either media literacy or critical media literacy. The *Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8:* Language (Revised) (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2006) defines critical literacy as a capacity to look beyond the literal meaning of text to see what is present or missing, and relates critical literacy to "fairness, equity and social justice" (p. 152). Although the word "critical" appears almost 50 times in the document, the curriculum policy does not outline any media literacy learning outcomes that are distinctly critical - that challenge hegemonic notions of how we should be and what we should buy (Stevens & Bean, 2007).

Whether or not critical media literacy is an education policy imperative, its recent introduction in education means that both classroom teachers and pre-service teachers need guidance as they undertake critical media literacy teaching and learning. Many pre-service teachers have not experienced a full media literacy curriculum in their elementary and secondary schooling. Moreover, they cannot rely entirely on their mentor teachers in schools for modeling and support because their mentor teachers may be acquiring the same skills. This situation underlines the importance of teaching critical media literacy skills in faculties of education. We are aided in this effort, however, by the positive attitudes of our pre-service teachers as they are open to new approaches and new ways of learning and are generally digitally-savvy. What remains challenging for us as language arts instructors is helping them understand the significance of critical media literacy education for their future students. We want them to see critical media literacy as a necessary set of skills for navigating the terrain of a consumer-focused culture. Accordingly, we want them to build strong skills for teaching critical media literacy.

Theoretical Framework

Several strands of theory inform our framework for critical media literacy instruction, in particular Luke and Freebody's (1999) roles of the reader: code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text critic (p. 4); Kellner and Share's (2007) four approaches to critical media literacy; and the New London Group's (1996) notion of the fully participating citizen. We assert that the appropriation of a range of literacy practices enhances students' agency over their life chances and their resources and allows them to better read their worlds, including media messages. Students need to engage in activities that allow them to act on the understanding that "texts are not ideologically natural or neutral – that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people's ideas" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 5).

Kellner and Share (2007) outline four major approaches to critical media literacy education and offer the view that three of these approaches have promise but are also problematic. The protectionist approach to media focuses on the dangers of a compliant public and its teaching is designed to "inoculate" (p.6) people against media dangers, such as media manipulation or excessive exposure to violence. They see elements of this protectionist approach as positive if and when it is also contextualized within society and history; they see the approach as flawed if it presents an overly-simplistic, de-contextualized, anti-media approach – even more so if it is taught using a dogmatic form of pedagogy. The second approach, media arts, is described as an appreciation of the aesthetic components of media but they caution that this approach could promote "individual self-expression over socially conscious analysis and alternative media production" (p. 7). It is important to open spaces for marginalized voices and for marginalized people to create their own representations. A third approach, the media literacy movement, is seen by Kellner and Share to have the potential to expand understandings of multiple forms of media but it may miss the key aspects of critiquing media. For example, examining whose interests are served by the media text and who exerts power and influence in the media message are key critical questions that may not be asked in a media literacy approach. Kellner and Share note that if the teacher takes the position that education is neutral, media literacy education falls short of its potential to be "a powerful instrument to challenge oppression and strengthen democracy" (p. 8).

Kellner and Share advocate a more comprehensive approach that encompasses elements of the first three. Students examine the media through a political lens, asking who is represented or missing and examining the media within the social context. They see this type of approach as a means of democratic social change that includes critical inquiry as well as the development of "alternative counter-hegemonic media" (p. 9). They align this approach with Luke and Freebody's (1999) notion of literacy as a family of practices, embracing their endorsement of individual teachers' decisions to combine pedagogies and curricula with different effect for different groups of students. Kellner and Share also recommend teaching the production of project-based media as a critical media literacy pedagogy in order to "[make] analyses more meaningful and empowering as students gain tools for responding and taking action on the social conditions and texts they are critiquing" (p.9). This form of media literacy is seen as a "critique of mainstream approaches to literacy and a political project for democratic social change" (p.

8).

Kellner and Share's first three approaches can be comfortably neutral for teachers. Aspects of the *protectionist approach* such as limiting viewing time and protecting children from violent television are accepted philosophies in mainstream culture. Identifying media techniques and appreciating multiple perspectives for different audiences (*media arts* and *media literacy* approaches) can be found in curriculum policies. The fourth approach, *critical media literacy*, requires the teacher to move away from a neutral stance and name social injustices. It requires also that teachers acknowledge that school is not a neutral space (Kelly & Brandes, 2001). When the teacher moves away from a neutral or pluralistic stance, students are encouraged to name and discuss injustices such as heterosexism and racial intolerance, and are asked to consider how to take action for social justice. The result is a more active form of citizenship (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

We situate our critical media literacy approach within an overarching framework that defines pedagogy as "a teaching and learning relationship that creates the potential for building learning conditions leading to full and equitable social participation" (New London Group, 1996, p. 60). We concur with the New London Group that the concepts and skills needed by pre-service teachers are changing. It is our goal to help pre-service teachers recognize privilege and disadvantage and work to narrow the disparities that exist in educational outcomes for different social groups. The New London Group proposes a theory of pedagogy that positions it as "a complex integration of four factors: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction; Critical Framing; and Transformed Practice" (1996, p. 83). We apply this framework when planning our instruction for the pre-service language arts course.

Situated practice in our course involves immersing pre-service teachers in the design of critical media literacy lessons (meaningful practices) while working with their peers as a community of learners. "Overt instruction" is explained by the New London Group in part as, "active interventions on the part of the teacher and other experts that scaffold learning activities" (p. 86). In our language arts course, the overt instruction is designed to help pre-service teachers build a metalanguage for critical media literacy analysis and interrogation. In debriefing course readings, for example, we discuss and define our understandings of this language in a deliberate way, sharing understandings of terms such as privilege, prejudice, oppression, marginalization, voice, and hegemony. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to use critical framing to analyze media in its larger cultural context and critique its purpose. For example, the deregulation of children's television is often best examined through its historical and political perspectives. The fourth "how" of a multiliteracies pedagogy proposed by the New London Group is transformed practice – designed to encourage students to become "designers of social futures" (p. 65). We translate this notion to mean that we ask our pre-service teachers to consider what they have previously accepted or taken for granted, reflect on this, and then open themselves to new teaching practices that promote a pedagogy that makes a difference and includes social action.

We have attempted to integrate this multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 1996) as a framework for methods instruction. We contend that critical media

understandings can be facilitated if students are given opportunities to create their own digital messages (Buckingham, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1999) and we have attempted in our language arts methods classes to build critical media literacy skills. In this paper, we share reflections on pre-service teachers' critical media literacy lessons compiled over a two-year period. In particular, we sought evidence of how pre-service teachers' critical literacy understandings were translated into critical media literacy pedagogy. We will discuss our reflections with respect to the challenges faced by teachers as they build media literacy lessons and their mindful and innovative responses to perceived current media pressures to conform to purchase goods and services, and to look a certain way. Our reflections focus on the following research questions: What are pre-service teachers' current understandings of the term social justice and the need for social justice? How do pre-service teachers' designs of critical media lesson plans incorporate the critical media literacy practices taught in our language arts methods classes? What can we learn from this investigation that will inform our practice as professors of pre-service language arts?

The Study: Design and Process

We conceptualize our research as a self-study in teacher education. Self-study in education is form of scholarship that is significant and growing (Samaras & Freese, 2009). We ask questions about our own practice and demonstrate risk-taking in making our investigation and our findings public. Self-study research differs from action research in several ways. One of these differences is the focus of research on the self, in this case the role of the professor in teacher education. We were open with our pre-service teachers about this collaborative research on our own practice. The pre-service teachers received a letter inviting them to participate in the research, but the consent forms were not opened until after they had received their grades for the assignments at the end of the first semester. They were invited to participate in interviews during their second semester when they were no longer enrolled in our course.

The task of designing the critical media literacy lesson was scaffolded by dividing it into three parts: first pre-service teachers designed digital stories to build skills in multi-literacies (Robertson & Hughes, 2010; Hughes & Robertson, 2010); then they presented digital social justice book talks (Hughes & Robertson, this issue), an activity designed to raise their awareness of the need to address social justice issues with children (see Harste, 2003; Lelande, Harste & Huber, 2005; Moller, 2002). The final task was to design and teach a critical media literacy lesson which could be taught during one of their practice teaching placements.

We examined multiple data sources including initial surveys of pre-service teachers' understandings of social justice, a document analysis of the media literacy lessons produced over a two-year period from four classes of pre-service teachers, and a series of interviews with volunteer pre-service teachers who discussed the design of their critical media literacy lessons after their practice teaching placement. In order to explore further the key themes and questions, we conducted a content analysis of the completed surveys and interview transcripts. We drew on Kellner and Share's (2007) ideas to develop an analytic framework for examining critical media literacy lessons. We began with four categories: Protectionist, Media as an Art Form, Media Literacy and Critical

Media Literacy based on Kellner and Share's (2007) categories of media education approaches discussed earlier. Two additional categories were added during the assessment process. "Approaching Critical" was added because a number of pre-service teacher lessons had critical elements to them and these lessons promised to become full critical media literacy lessons, but had problems such as lack of focus. Other lessons could not be assessed because the ideas were not fully developed, were not original, or were in some way not appropriate for the intended audience. We classified these as "Not Applicable." A blind-review process was used to assess the lessons which provoked much discussion among the researchers regarding the critical elements of the lessons as well as the suggested additional categories. For example, the *taking action* element was added to the critical media literacy category, not as a required element, but to distinguish lessons that moved beyond media techniques. For the most part, the pre-service teachers considered it important to know the media techniques, but not many of them questioned the purposes for which these techniques were used and the ethical implications of using them. Figure 1 (below) indicates the categories that were used for the analysis of the critical media literacy lessons.

Media Literacy Approach	*Characteristics of Pre-service Lessons using this Approach*
1. 1. Protectionist	Media has hidden dangers, e.g., too much TV can promote violence
1. 2. Media as an Art Form	Focus on teaching the conventions of media design without facing the issues such as who is present or missing in the representation
1. 3. Media literacy	Investigation of multiple forms of media, examining how we communicate for different audiences and purposes, addresses some stereotypes but not why they are harmful
1. 4. Approaching Critical	Lessons in this category generally focus on media literacy but they have "critical nuggets" that can be developed further
1. 5. Critical Media Literacy	Media is not neutral; Interrogates representations; Asks students to consider social issues e.g., why poverty, Children's Rights are not easy topics; Interrogates the agenda of profit or power; Critiques misleading media messages; Encourages reconstruction of society. Encourages action that addresses the injustice in some way.
1. 6. Not Applicable	Lesson is not developed/not age-appropriate/not original design

Figure 1. Analysis Categories.

Findings
Pre-service Teachers' Understandings of Social Justice

Pre-service teachers come to faculties of education with a wide range of

understandings of the term 'social justice' and the need for social justice. Most of the pre-service teachers who participated in the interviews and surveys indicated that they understood that the role of the teacher is to help children be aware of the inequities in society, especially those inequities not recognized by the school system. The pre-service teachers noticed that there were disparities in resources among different schools and different classrooms in schools. They also noticed under-representations of some social groups in the resources in schools. They commented that the schools they visited did not have books that represented lower income neighbourhoods as positive spaces, nor were there books that depicted a range of abilities or a range of family types. One of the pre-service teachers said that all of the literature in her placement classes was either "fluffy or hockey" with no books or discussions about social justice issues. They saw other disparities: noting that some classrooms did not have any books while other classrooms had extensive classroom libraries. They also noticed that there are few resources in schools to address social justice issues and some classrooms had no resources at all to support children's understandings of injustice.

In the interviews and reflections, pre-service teachers expressed an emergent understanding that they could have an impact on the lives of students. Most of the pre-service teachers indicated that they felt empowered to introduce new thinking in the lives of their future students. One teacher candidate expressed this as "a desire to treat children the way they deserve to be treated." Others indicated that they wanted to teach critical media literacy skills so that "children would not be suckers" for the media, to help children realize "the sell", and to educate children to recognize pitfalls of the "easy access to sex" culture. They indicated that they wanted to be agents of change in their schools – introducing literature addressing social justice issues and challenging students to make a difference and support causes such as a children's charity called 'Me to We'. In contrast to this view, however, a few pre-service teachers indicated that they saw the role of education and the educator as neutral. They did not see a need for social justice action on the part of the teacher because this might be seen as influencing children or taking sides. They saw the role of the teacher as someone who "gives them the facts" and does not "sway their opinions."

While pre-service teachers demonstrated a wide range of interests in social justice issues, there were some social justice themes that appeared more frequently than others in the lessons: media presentations of unnatural and unattainable body images; links between marginalization and bullying; and transparency in advertising (e.g., advertisements that present unhealthy food choices as healthy or making toys appear more appealing in media than they are in real life. Less common topics were those that questioned the use of celebrity status to sell products; gender and lifestyle assumptions in advertising; and the lack of advertising in support of important social causes.

Understandings of Media Literacy Concepts

A detailed analysis of the media literacy approach used in the lesson design suggests that the majority of pre-service teachers who participated in the study were comfortable constructing media literacy lessons to meet mandated provincial media literacy outcomes. Only one of the media literacy lessons was classified as Protectionist

in its orientation and none of the media literacy lessons analyzed employed a Media as Art approach. Pre-service teachers indicated that they understand that media messages are constructed according to rules and conventions and they indicate that they understand that different audiences perceive media messages differently. The majority of the lessons employed complex media literacy deconstruction techniques. There were 28 lessons that followed the Media Literacy approach. Typical in these lesson presentations were media elements such as target audience, media purpose, media forms, media conventions, elements of text, and overt and implied messages. The majority of lessons (84.5%) were assessed as meeting the Ontario Ministry of Education criteria for media literacy (lessons from categories 3, 4 and 5). The chart below indicates the number of lessons in each of the categories as a percentage.

Media Literacy Approach	*#*	*%*	*Media Literacy lessons*	*Critical Media Literacy lessons*
1. 1. Protectionist	1	1.%		
1. 2. Media as an Art Form	0	-		
1. 3. Media literacy	28	39.%	85% of the lessons demonstrate understanding of media literacy concepts	
1. 4. Approaching Critical	15	21%		45% of the lessons demonstrated understanding of critical media literacy concepts
1. 5. Critical Media Literacy	17	24%		
1. 6. Not Applicable	10	14%		

Figure 2. Distribution of Media literacy lessons per category (n=71).

Close to half of the pre-service teachers' lessons (45%) were categorized as Critical. Of these, more than half were critical and complex in their design while the rest had some strong critical elements. The lessons of the pre-service teachers did not appear to include the element of helping students understand the underlying values or points of view. For example, teacher candidates rarely articulated that media is constructed for purposes such as profit or power. Most lessons did identify that advertising could be harmful if it is deceptive for children. A few of the pre-service teachers indicated that they wanted children to recognize when the advertisers were "selling" them on images rather than the actual product being advertised. For example, some lessons they designed for the primary grades focused on how different cereal boxes would appeal to different audiences but the pre-service teachers did not venture into deeper discussions for example, about how messages and 'sells' can be absorbed unconsciously.

In another instance, a pre-service teacher asked her students to deconstruct a car commercial showing a blonde woman ordering food in a library. The stated message of

the ad was that 'what is inside is what counts.' In debriefing this lesson, the pre-service teacher indicated that the advertisement was tricking the audience because the meaning of the ad was really that "the girl was really stupid" because the advertisement was really about a car, although it never actually addressed the assets of the car. The pre-service teacher did not make a deeper connection with ways in which women are constructed or represented in advertising, for example. Similarly, pre-service teachers designed lessons to help students identify stereotypes, but some did not articulate why they thought that stereotypes were harmful, though one teacher candidate did make a connection between stereotypes and bullying.

Samples of the media literacy lessons produced by the pre-service teachers help to illustrate how their lessons matched the criteria for the analysis categories. This is presented in Figure 3 below.

Media Approach	Samples of Lessons Created by Pre-service Teachers
Protectionist	Gr. 6 lesson: Students are shown a video clip of a makeover and the teacher introduces the concept that media images are unreasonable and unrealistic. Students create a magazine collage of advertisements that the students judge to be not realistic. The portrayal of perfect people in the magazine is presented as problematic without discussion about why unrealistic images are used or why they are problematic.
Media Literacy	Gr. 1 lesson: The teacher candidate encourages students to examine their favourite television programs and identify the characteristics of these programs that appeal to them as an audience. The teacher identifies the importance of teaching children that media is deliberately constructed but this is not addressed in the actual lesson. The task is scaffolded as grade one students are taught definitions of audience and appeal through an engaging class discussion.

Gr. 4 lesson: The teacher candidate prepares a PowerPoint™ slideshow that has images of cartoons, comic strips, the cover of tabloids and gossip magazines, music video screen shots and Face book™ and My Space™ screen shots. The students discuss the role of media in entertaining us and make connections between the media conventions and how the audience feels when it is being entertained.

Gr.6 lesson: students view a McDonald's™ commercial featuring an Olympic athlete. The teacher candidate asks them to consider the target audience, but also asks the class, "Do you think Olympic athletes eat at McDonald's?" The students then deconstruct a series of advertisements |

	looking for overt and implied messages. Example: "Is the message of a Lotto 649 commercial that winning the lottery guarantees happiness? Why is this problematic?" The lesson identified that commercials make assumptions and students should learn to identify the implied messages.
Approaching Critical	Gr. 3 lesson: The teacher candidate shows two celebrity images on the interactive white board: In one, the celebrity is wearing non-functional clothing and in the second, functional clothing. Students are asked to think of the activities that they do at school and what kind of clothing is needed for the activities they do. Students search through magazines and graph the prevalence of functional vs. non-functional clothing found in the magazine. (The issue of gender is not addressed in this lesson.) Gr. 6 lesson: Students watch a *DOVE™* video about a photo makeover and consider what the media portrays as pretty and whether or not our image of pretty has been manufactured by the media and numerous other searching questions about the impact of celebrities and media in students' lives. (Many critical issues introduced but the lesson lacks clear scaffolding and development of concepts). Gr. 7 lesson: The teacher candidate has both age-appropriate support materials but also some materials that are not age-appropriate. The age-appropriate materials are clips of magazine ads. The inappropriate material is a YouTube video with explicit images. Students are asked to consider the overt and implied messages on the magazine ads (What is this ad really selling?) The teacher candidate identifies that images in the media influence young people and it is important to help students understand that the media portrays an unrealistic and unattainable body image. The worksheet challenges students to change the stereotypes and consider healthy body images.
Critical Media Literacy	Gr. 3 lesson: Students compare the taste of popcorn from a bag that has a logo on it with popcorn from a bag that does not have a logo, and discuss the role of logos in advertising. The teacher shows a Photo Story of logos from for-profit and not-for-profit organizations and students identify the logos they recognize. The teacher states, "The logos that you could not recognize were ones from nonprofit organizations. This means that these organizations are not looking to make a profit. Organizations such as the United Way, The World Wildlife Fund and the Breast Cancer Society do collect money but they use the money to help people or animals in need. Why do we not recognize their logos?"

	Gr. 6 lesson: The teacher wants to encourage children to analyze issues in a way that may change their outlook. She also wants to raise their awareness of an issue that they may not have considered relevant. Students review the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child and then critically assess a news article on the 20th anniversary of the publication of children's rights. The teacher asks the class to consider how prevalent poverty is in the world and why it is difficult to talk about it except on occasions such as the 20th anniversary of the publication. The teacher encourages students to reflect by asking "Looking at the picture of the little boy lying on the dog in the street, what UN conventions are being violated?" Gr. 7/8 lesson: Students consider how the people they know are unique in their colour, size, features and personality. Students discern the overt and implied messages in a magazine cover that shows an athlete with a clothing model. The focus of the lesson is to raise students' awareness of the media's role in dictating standards of attractiveness to society and to understand how media can affect their own feelings of self-worth.
Lessons not placed in a category	Example: Too much in the lesson to find the focus/ideas not developed/content and age mismatch e.g., some images not appropriate for the grade/lesson is too similar to one found on a well-known media awareness website.

Figure 3. Sample Media Literacy Lessons Organized by Category of Analysis.

Critical Media Literacy

While many of the pre-service teachers said that they wanted to raise students' awareness and empower them to deconstruct media, they also commented that they found it challenging to create the critical media lessons. Only one indicated receiving any previous media literacy exposure in secondary school; several indicated that their first exposure to critical deconstruction was at the university level; and others said that the pre-service language arts class was the first time they had considered many of the issues. Several pre-service teachers expressed the view that critical media literacy is "new" for their generation. Several mentioned to us that their parents had been openly discriminatory in multiple ways that were considered acceptable for that generation, and that their generation is among the first to name and confront discrimination. It is significant that only one participant reported to us that she had seen a critical media literacy lesson modeled by her supervising (associate/mentor teacher) and she indicated to us that this had strongly impacted her view of the importance of critical thinking and the degree to which children's thinking can be challenged. She described each aspect of that lesson in detail, stressing that what had impressed her most was that her mentor teacher was encouraging the students to think independently rather than trying to please

the teacher. Her mentor teacher taught a series of lessons on overt and implied messages about women in text and media. This participant showed a more in-depth understanding of critical media literacy than many of her peers.

Pre-service teachers indicated to us that they do see a role for themselves in teaching critical media literacy and their comments indicate to us that they consider it to be "very, very important." Their expressed reasons for teaching critical media literacy appear to be situated in their caring for their students and the pre-service teachers' desires to help students become educated and aware citizens of the 21st century. This is one representative comment about the pre-service teacher's future students, "It is very important to teach them to be future active members of the society that I myself live in. They have to realize that we all share this world." A deeper look at their comments reveals, however, that the pre-service teacher appears to be in the initial stages of understanding what it means to teach for social justice and what it means to apply critical literacy skills.

Many of the pre-service teachers focused on one feature of critical literacy without expressing connections across issues. For example, one teacher candidate used the Smart board to show advertisements of a clothing line where the male model for the clothing is topless, and explained that the goal was to "bring some humour" to the critical media lesson. When prompted, the teacher candidate said that she wanted to "help them [the students] have critical discussions and ask critical questions about what they're seeing rather than just accepting it and moving on." The implication was the paradox that the male model was topless but selling clothing. The teacher candidate saw this as the hidden message without seeing other potential connections to the deeper issues of pervasive body perfection codes in media, and their growing impact on boys and men (See for example Grogan, 2008; Kehler & Atkinson, 2010).

The Role of Digital Media in Teaching Critical Media Literacy

Pre-service teachers' lessons employed digital literacies in order to promote media literacy. Their lesson designs used digital media in innovative ways, but they relied on the Internet to provide engaging clips of advertisements and YouTube™ features such as the *Dove™* makeover video clip in order to present concepts. They employed short video clips for example to demonstrate product placements in film and television, and to create their own digital stories to teach the media skills. They used newspaper clippings that were available online and most used digital resources to investigate media awareness sites. Many of the pre-service teachers combined digital media to produce their own media to teach their critical media literacy lessons. They indicated that they appreciated the modeling of the use of digital media in their classes at the faculty of education. A gap was present, however, in that they also commented that projectors and Smart boards were not available in many of the classrooms and they had to book space in the school library to use digital media for their lessons.

Discussion and Implications

Our research helped us begin to understand how pre-service teachers think about social justice and injustice and how their notions about social justice are revealed in their

critical media literacy lesson designs. This research has heightened our awareness of a dual challenge we face as pre-service instructors: to help pre-service teachers build skills in critical media literacy pedagogy; and to help them gain an understanding of why critical media literacy skills are an increasing imperative in a democratic society. We need to help our students arrive at a more comprehensive definition of critical literacy skills and provide opportunities for them to explore how these skills are related to a social justice project. Our findings regarding the level of support needed for pre-service teachers to articulate critical considerations support Kincheloe's (2004) position that critical pedagogy is a complex entity that asks a great deal from the teachers who practice it.   He posits that pre-service teachers have challenges with addressing the political dimensions of schooling in part because many of them are the successes of that same system. He argues too that recognizing how culture, class, gender and race have shaped schooling is one of the first steps toward developing a social activist teacher persona. Critical media literacy helps teachers expand their view of curriculum from a narrow one that focuses on repetition and recall to one that helps them critique texts and institutions (p.239). In order for teachers to move in this direction they need to shift their perspective from neutral to "a more active form of citizenship" (Kelly & Brandes, 2001, p.438). Our reflection and investigation into critical literacy teaching has allowed us to be more explicit about what we mean when we use those terms with our pre-service teachers. Kelly (1997) offers this description of critical literacy, which provides a foundation for our future forays into critical media literacy:

> Critical literacy is a literacy of social transformation in which the ideological foundations of knowledge, culture, schooling and identity-making are recognized as unavoidably political, marked by vested interests and hidden agendas. Its curriculum is the everyday world as text and the analytic frameworks necessary to deconstruct it; its pedagogy is situated, interrogative, and counter-hegemonic. (p.10)

Our research points to a number of potential reasons that explain why teaching critical media literacy is so challenging: (1) According to Duncan et.al. (2002) the first push for media literacy education programs in Canada began in the 1990's so it cannot be assumed that pre-service teachers will have explored media literacy prior to enrolling in faculties of education. The pre-service teachers in this study indicated that they had little previous exposure to media literacy, critical pedagogy or critical media literacy in their earlier schooling; (2) The pre-service teachers indicated that the mentor teachers are themselves at different stages of implementing media literacy approaches. The mentor teachers may not themselves see or understand the need for critical pedagogy approaches to media literacy; (3) Critical media literacy construction and deconstruction are not easy practices to grasp and pre-service teachers need a metalanguage to help them articulate the ideas; (4) Teachers and schools appear to be at the initial stages of developing resources to address issues of social injustice; and 5) Schools are at different stages of implementing technology, and teacher candidates cannot anticipate that schools can provide equipment and technical support for lessons that employ digital technology to deconstruct media.

Labbo and Reinking (1999) remind us that while technology offers us possibilities for literacy instruction, new digital technologies should be used to "positively transform" instruction and "empower students" (p. 481). Our findings encourage us in this direction. Pre-service teachers demonstrated to us an enthusiasm for teaching media literacy and indicate comfort with using multiple literacies and digital technologies to engage students in media literacy investigations. We can continue to expect delightful surprises as they are encouraged to exercise their creativity. The skill that is more challenging to them is that of designing critical media literacy lessons. Our research indicates that they will need continued exposure, discussion and time to understand with a depth that allows them to teach critical literacy skills. We can support them by building a stronger discourse of critical media analysis and through continued modeling. These findings underline for us the efficacy of the pedagogical model provided by the New London Group (1996) with its emphasis on situated practice, overt instruction, and critical framing as precursors to transformed practice.

The role of critical media literacy is to help students identify and seek alternative views for taken-for-granted assumptions. The pre-service teachers in our study demonstrated that they needed support and scaffolding for their initial forays into lesson development in this arena. An element that may figure more prominently in our future instruction is teaching critical media literacy through production. Kellner and Share (2007) suggest, "While not everyone has the tools to create sophisticated media productions, we strongly recommend a pedagogy of teaching critical media literacy through project-based media production (even if it is as simple as rewriting a text or drawing pictures) for making analyses more meaningful and empowering as students gain tools for responding and taking action on the social conditions and texts they are critiquing" (p. 9).

It was clear to us in this study that both we and the pre-service teachers are growing in the understanding of what is involved in the design of critical media literacy lessons. As beginning teachers, they are struggling with trying to include many new understandings and concepts into their lessons while using age-appropriate approaches, resources and language. Yet there is the promise of emancipatory outcomes from these and other efforts to help pre-service teachers build critical media literacy skills using new literacies. We anticipate further rich conversations as the research community engages with critical media literacy and equity issues for pre-service teachers.

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