This Won't Be on the Final
Reflections on Teaching Critical Media Literacy

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Abstract

Long time media literacy educator, Rhonda Hammer, reflects on the development of her ideas and work in media education. Through an analysis of the current state of education and the need to create critically literate citizens for the 21st century, Hammer frames critical media literacy within a context of radical pedagogy. This chapter provides an in depth description of Hammer's critical media literacy class that she has taught at UCLA for almost a decade. This class combines critical analysis with alternative media production, thereby providing students the framework to interrogate ideology and the politics of representation with the tools of semiotics and hands on media production. Hammer's reflections offer a wealth of examples of successes and struggles, for almost anyone interested, to be able to apply her ideas in their own course.

■ "This Won't Be on the Final"

Reflections on Teaching Critical Media Literacy[1]

Rhonda Hammer

Everyone's been there. The professor has just explained a central idea to the class and asked if there are any questions. There is that awkward silence, interrupted by a few coughs. Even the sound of text messaging has disappeared. Then a student raises her hand. Everyone hopes that s/he is going to ask something which will provoke the professor to further clarify dimensions of the lecture or generate a discussion. But, instead, it is that insidious question which punctuates so many undergraduate classes—at the most inappropriate of times—"Will this be on the final?"

Nothing can be more deflating to an instructor's ego—especially when you are on a "roll"-—or hijacks an animated class discussion faster than these kinds of queries. Yet this escalating obsession with grades is understandable given the pressures experienced by so many 21st-century students, especially in relation to acceptance to more advanced programs, a radically declining job market, certain forms of financial assistance and sometimes unreasonable expectations and demands by parents.

Although this scenario has happened to me on too many occasions to count, it never fails to catch me off guard. It is not only disconcerting but is also a glaring reminder of the nature of "knowledge" as a commodity, which seems to be no longer measured by learning but almost solely by "grades." And it is these grades, regardless of whether they are earned or not,[2] which constitute the dominant currency of many students' experience in and relationship to education in contemporary universities.

Indeed, the commodification of grades has reached such epic proportions that new businesses have evolved,[3] such as the *Campus Buddy Site* which provides its customers with the grade distributions of courses and professors from over 32 California universities

and community colleges. It seems that it is not enough to just rate professors in regard to the effectiveness of their teaching style and the rigors of the course but to assess them in relation to what really counts: how easily they grade. Unfortunately, this focus on grades as the goal of the course reduces the quality of higher education to what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels described as "commodity fetishism," the process in which social relationships are transformed into objects or commodities, often translated into monetary terms. This fetishism is especially apparent in how the creators of Buddy Site advertise their service: they assert that, "As students you don't get paid. Your salary's your grade" (quoted in: Fung, 2008).

Although this "truism" is, in fact, largely fallacious—given that potential employers rarely, if ever, require the inclusion of grade transcripts in job applications[4]—it is an indication of what many describe as a crisis in education which threatens the rights of students and faculty to pursue the kinds of critical learning needed to participate in a contemporary media and technological culture. In fact, this increasing fixation on grades reflects what many experts have described as the reduction of the complex and emancipatory process of higher education into a commodity product which is measured solely on the basis of its market value, especially in relation to job opportunities.

While grades may not matter to potential employers, the diploma and, even more importantly, its "brand" are now a prerequisite for most jobs, except for those that simply involve manual labor or "service industry" work, the majority of which fail to provide their workers with a "living wage."[5] As Stanley Aronowitz (2008) makes painfully clear:

> Ours is an era when 'higher education' credentials have become the new mantra of public schooling. The rationale for the need for credentials is the technological imperative, the material basis of which is deindustrialization. The days when a teenager could drop out of high school and get a decent-paying factory job or go into retailing or wholesaling with a prospect of eventually earning enough to support self and family with dignity are, it seems, long gone.(10)

Given the ever-increasing off-shore outsourcing of blue- and white-collar jobs and industries, which under the rubric of so-called "free trade" allowed corporations to cut their operating costs and increase their profits, a college or university diploma is now considered a mandatory requirement for a relatively decent paying job in the United States (especially given the shrinking job market and rising unemployment rates).[6]

Within this context, "learning" has been largely replaced by "vocational training" in American universities and colleges (Aronowitz, 2000). Even though some would argue that this mode of education trains graduates to meet the needs of many private and corporate employers, in its most vulgar form it deprives students of participation in what many scholars contend is the mainstay of post-secondary education: to "develop skills of critical analysis," to "engage differences of opinion," as well as to "imagine alternative futures, decide on their intended careers, and consider their larger life's work of contributing to the common good" (AAC&U, 2006).

Moreover, given the massive downsizing and bankruptcy of so many corporations and businesses and the escalating numbers of unemployed, authoritarian training which "favors a series of measures that hold students accountable for passing standardized tests and for a definite quantity [rather than quality] of education" is actually detrimental. Such education deprives students of the critical and creative abilities which are now a pre-

requisite for their own survival, as well as for a collective democratic reshaping of a social system which has proven to be completely dysfunctional (Aronowitz, 2008: 16).

As Giroux and Giroux (2008) point out, the devastating failures of "free market fundamentalism," or what is often referred to as "neo-liberalism," have provoked many to demand a radical restructuring of the economic system and a return to "a form of governance that assumed a measure of responsibility for the education, health and general welfare of its citizens (ibid.)." However, what many of these critics are failing to include is that this kind of reform presumes that "we have on hand and in stock generations of young people and adults who have somehow been schooled in an entirely different set of values and cultural attitudes…and who are not only intellectually prepared but morally committed to the staggering challenges that comprehensive reform requires" (ibid.). Yet, due in large part to the cooptation of US public education by the "standards movement"—which Aronowitz describes as "a euphemism for the subordination of pedagogy to tests"—many lack the necessary abilities to even understand or constructively criticize the pathological consumption-based ideology and practices which have wreaked such devastating havoc on the national and global economy and ruined the lives of so many people (2008: xviii).

In fact, the massive cut-backs in government support of our public education and the consequent endorsement of so-called standardized testing, dubbed by the Bush administration as the "No Child Left Behind" program, have contributed to alarming increases in illiteracy as well as the deteriorating quality of education in the United States. The realities and outrageous consequences of this have been demonstrated in a "2006 study supported by the Pew Charitable Trust [that] found that *50% of college seniors scored below 'proficient' levels on a test that required them to do such basic tasks as understand the arguments of newspaper editorials or compare credit-card offers"* (Nemko, 2008; *emphasis mine).* Moreover, according to the same study only 20% had basic quantitative skills, while a 2006 federal commissioned report found that: "Over the past decade, literacy among college graduates has actually declined.…According to the most recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy, for instance, the percentage of college graduates deemed proficient in prose literacy has actually declined from 40 percent to 31 percent in the past decade" (ibid).

Our best hope of democratizing society is through what Thomas Jefferson defined as an educated and "informed citizenry." However, corporate and privatized media which have tremendous influence over our citizens are systematically misinforming and miseducating our students and citizens, as Chomsky, Herman, and others have long pointed out. In this situation, we have the need to make critical thinking and media literacy a fundamental part of contemporary education. This has become decidedly more urgent in light of the toxic effects of what Naomi Klein (2007) describes as "disaster capitalism" whereby corporate elites manipulate the system for their own power and profit, while systematically undermining democracy.

In this chapter, I argue for the importance of developing critical media and cultural studies courses for all levels of schooling—and especially within post-secondary institutions—as a necessary requirement for reclaiming participatory democracy. In the following discussion, I will first argue for the necessity of the adoption within educational institutions of a radical form of media literacy which finds its foundations in an insurgent peda-

gogy which is critical, humanizing, and empowering. Indeed, as Aronowitz so cogently explains it: "any reasonable concept of democratic citizenship requires an individual who is able to discern knowledge from propaganda, is competent to choose among conflicting claims and programs, and is capable of actively participating in the affairs of the polity" (2008: 17). Hence, a critical education needs to give students the power to question authority, express their own views and provide them with the skills and time for self-reflection and creativity. This also entails the promotion of a lifestyle change which celebrates and prioritizes the pleasures of "thinking" and learning, eschewing the time-consuming and mind-numbing practices mediated by a politics of greed and obsession with consumption which distracts us from critical engagement in our everyday lives. Yet, this is an arduous and challenging task, given that it involves our recognition, and even condemnation of the ideology of neo-liberalism, "the political philosophy that dogmatically equates generating profits with generating maximum human happiness," which pervades all of our social, political and economic institutions as well as the cultural standards which mediate our collective and individual values and beliefs, to various degrees.

In the second part of this chapter, I will describe my own efforts at UCLA and elsewhere to create courses in critical media literacy in which students are encouraged to exercise their creative potential and critical thinking through the production of media projects. One of the goals of these courses is to reshape student visions so that they can become informed and active participants in multiple dimensions of social life and provoke and engage in the advance of participatory democracy.

■ Radical Pedagogy and Critical Media Literacy

Part of the problem with contemporary university education is that an obsession with grades and training for jobs is facilitated by a pedagogy that treats students as passive objects of indoctrination. In his classic 1970 text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire identified and critiqued a dominant educational form of teaching, which he argued restricted and "annulled" students' capacities for creative thought and critical consciousness. He described this as the "banking concept of education," in which students are treated as empty accounts, in which teachers deposit educational currency which is stored, filed, and later withdrawn. Freire goes on to argue that this dehumanizing practice, for both students and teachers, encourages students to accept the "passive roles imposed on them" as well as "the fragmented view of reality" which has been deposited in their cerebral accounts (2001: 73).

One of the most repressive and debilitating aspects of this banking system of education is that it teaches us to never question authority and to therefore treat socially constructed hierarchical relations of power as if they are inherent and natural. It is within this type of oppressive pedagogy that commercial values and market logic supersede fundamental democratic principles of education, which demand exploration of diversities of ideas, including those which elicit us to question conventional wisdoms and so-called

truths, including our own. In other words, a key dimension of higher education is to promote "self-reflexivity" which is loosely described as on-going conversations with yourself, in relation to the wide range of experiences which have shaped your identity(ies) and provoke you to examine and interrogate your own unconscious biases and perceptions of the world. Yet, such critical education is at odds with a key function of educational institutions in the United States, which is to train students to "define themselves as consumers rather than as multifaceted social actors" (Giroux, 2003: 173).

This alienated consumption-based relationship between student and teacher is one in which students are evaluated by their abilities to memorize and repeat the "knowledge" which has been imparted to them by their teacher and/or texts. Further, the instructor's worth is largely gauged by the students on how well s/he trains or prepares them to excel on standardized course tests and assignments that are designed to "evaluate the student's ability to imbibe and regurgitate information and to solve problems according to prescribed algorithms" (Aronowitz, 2008: 17). Hence, although Freire's critique of the banking method is over 40 years old, it is still an apt description of the prevailing mode of teaching in many contemporary colleges and universities.

In fact, many argue that the primary purpose of this training/banking mode of education is "to help the student adapt to the prevailing order" and "to identify with social and cultural authorities" (Aronowitz, 2000: 1). Or as David Nasaw more bluntly puts it, this training model "rob[s] students of their individuality" and trains them to become "cogs in the corporate machine" (cited in Aronowitz, 2000: 3). [7] A common critique of the conformist standardized banking education is that it does not adequately prepare students for the contemporary world that demands skills in cognitive thinking, multiple literacies in media and technology, and the ability for autonomous thought and action.

This is not to say that courses which focus on technical education and particular dimensions of job training have no place within the academic domain. However, as Henry and Susan Giroux assert: "while the university should equip people to enter the workplace, it should also educate them to contest workplace inequalities" (2004: 10). Progressive education should also challenge injustices which mediate students' own personal experiences as well as contribute to a globalized corporate mentality which promotes a politics of greed within an atmosphere of moral panic and a culture of fear. Sociologist Barry Glassner (2003) contends that: "In the U.S, our fears are so exaggerated and out of control that anxiety is the number one mental problem in the country."

I would argue that the kinds of growing anxieties which typify university and college experiences personify the increasing diversities of manufactured and inflated fears and terror which characterize contemporary American life. And it is largely through transnationally controlled mainstream media—in conjunction with other hegemonic institutions, such as big business, government, education, and organized religion—that these kinds of largely unfounded and overstated dangers are promulgated (Glassner, 1999).

Such fears, both real and imaginary, prevent us from criticizing our socio-political and economic system and contribute to the ideological blinders that distract us from questioning the authority and decisions of those who are in the positions of power and who are responsible for a variety of our social problems. Glassner and many others, such as Pulitzer prize-winning investigative reporter Naomi Klein, argue that the escalation

and repeated employment of fear mongering by those in power (such as the Bush Administration) have managed to induce a kind of collective psychological shock on the American people, which can leave us traumatized, deeply disoriented, far more open to suggestion and often incapable of rational thought or protecting our own self-interests (Klein, 2007: 16).

Recently, the media and those in positions of power have been promoting some justifiable fears about the future of the United States and anxieties about our financial well-being and future. However, the media and government's unrelenting practice of employing "shock and awe" tactics to intensify our panic, rarely if ever explain how our tax dollars are being spent, or that radical shifts in priorities and the redistribution of these allocations, could resolve our current crisis. Indeed, instead of berating us with double-speak and incomprehensible explanations of economics, bail-outs, speculative stocks, budget deficit balloons, national debts, complicated investment practice and so on, they should be addressing and examining the failures of our current so-called free market, neo-liberal system, which is loosely described as a "grim alignment of the state, corporate capital and transnational corporations" (Giroux and Giroux, 2008).

It is within this context that mainstream corporate media provoke us to believe that the government and corporations are offering the only possible solutions and always include a variety of so-called "experts" to justify these positions. Yet, they omit to report on the kinds of contextual information which would better inform the public in regard to these decisions. In fact, many find it outrageous that the media never indicate that the economic crisis could be alleviated if, for example, the government stopped investing so much in war and militarism. There is never any questioning of why 42 percent of our tax dollars are spent directly or indirectly on defense. "Even nonwar military expenditures have soared. With so much money spent on weapons that don't work against enemies that don't exist, there is ample room to increase security at the same time that we cut defense expenditures" (Stiglitz, 2008). Indeed, Joseph Stiglitz, who won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2001, has documented that the direct and indirect costs of the Iraq war have been three trillion dollars! (ibid.).

Although the U.S. can spend $3 trillion on wars of choice and can recommend a bailout program for big corporations that could cost trillions, we are told that there is not enough money for basic needs of education, health care, social services or our deteriorating infrastructure. Scandalously, students are being forced to pay even higher tuition and increase their already escalating student loans (many of which are privatized with high interest rates) for a declining quality of education, due, in large part to increasing cut-backs in state funding, which many governors, like California's Arnold Schwarzenegger, threaten will be even further reduced in light of the financial crisis. And even though the new Obama administration has promised to address some of these concerns, it is unlikely—given the priorities of the new administration and the horrendous economic mess he has inherited—that we will see the kinds of radical reforms necessary for the reinstitution of the "widespread calls for 'participatory democracy,' a vision of society administered collectively by—and according to the needs of—its various constituents . . ." (Ewen, 1996: 405).

Yet, why do we rarely question the solutions proposed by those in positions of power, or demand more progressive alternatives? It is in part because we have been indoctrinated to believe that, in Robert McChesney's words: "there is…no alternative to the status quo [that] will improve matters" (2004: 10).[8] It is in this sense that the corporate media are a primary vehicle of promoting the often false and exaggerated fears that are embroidered into the fabric of every domain of life, from the university to the political system, while not providing alternative views that challenge the existing power structure.

The ubiquity of media in a multiplicity of forms and the prominent roles they play in our everyday experiences demand that media become a compulsory area of critical inquiry and investigation in all levels of educational curricula. This kind of critical thinking would liberate the majority of Americans to "think outside of the box" of the dominant ideology and corporate system and look for new political and social alternatives.

As Richard Beach points out, according to recent studies 8-year-olds to 18-year-olds are devoting 8 and a half hours a day to media-related activity, while college students aged 18 to 24 spend "an average of 11 hours a day involved in some sort of media or digital communications" (2009, pg. 206). Given the nature of our contemporary society and global world, it is crucial that all citizens become literate in media culture, emergent new media, and related developing technological, computer, and web 2.0 digital forms. Many argue that universities in particular have a responsibility to provide students with multiple techno-literacy and critical pedagogical skills to overcome the limitations of purely technical media production or computer literacy courses which are becoming the norm within a variety of educational institutions (see Jhally and Earp (2006: 232ff). As Carmen Luke argues: "Most universities include these new info- or techno-literacies in their lists of promised graduate outcomes. Yet they remain conceptually and practically grounded in an instrumental end user rationale rather than a critical analytic approach" (Luke, 2009: pg. 194).[9] However, many colleges and universities in the U.S. are cutting back on even those courses and workshops which teach students the necessary rudimentary technological skills they need for pursuing critical media literacy projects.

I argue for the importance of teaching critical media literacy from a perspective that seeks to empower students by giving them abilities to read, critique, and produce media, which in turn, teaches them to become active participants rather than "sophisticated consumers" in a highly hyper*media*ted culture and society (Jhally and Lewis, 2006: 225). Given the power of the contemporary media and consciousness industry in that it shapes "virtually every sphere of public and political life" (Jhally and Earp, 2006: 244), it is more important than ever to "understand media," as McLuhan (1965) pointed out. Since, as Douglas Kellner reminds us, we are "immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society," (2009: pg. 5) it is essential that we privately and publicly interrogate the multidimensional and complex nature of mainstream and alternative media in a contextual manner. This demands that we take into account the political/economic dimensions and implications of media production and decode dominant and resistant values encoded in these texts. Yet we should also become literate in the technical codes which are employed in media productions, and, of course, in examining how and why divergent active audiences read texts differently.

In relation to film, for example, bell hooks explains that: "Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues" (1996: 2). Media texts dealing with such issues can provoke animated and passionate discussions and inspire students to actively engage in further research, writing, media productions, and activism.[10] Within this context, the essential dialectical nature of critical media literacy, which eschews binary oppositional notions that posit various forms of media as either good or bad becomes apparent. Popular media, like texts of high culture, are "polysemic" in that they often encode multiple and even paradoxical meanings as well as being open to a variety of interpretations. In fact, numerous perspectives are often expressed which can include "incredibly revolutionary standpoints merged with conservative ones" (hooks, 1996: 3). The contradictory and multidimensional nature of media culture, which can induce our greatest pleasures, can thus also generate important discussions and provide crucial insights into our society and culture.

It is important to note that there is no fundamental contradiction between pleasure and critique, as critique can provide its own pleasures, and cultural studies attempts to understand popular pleasures rather than denounce them.[11] Moreover, as the astute film critic Pauline Kael described it, criticism can, in fact, enhance pleasure. As she explains:

> Readers of *The New Yorker,* where my reviews have appeared for the past twenty years, frequently ask if I don't sometime just go to the movies for pleasure. My answer is that I always do. I got hooked on movies at an early age…and I am still a child before a moving image. I want to watch it; I want to see what comes next. This desire to be caught up—to be entranced—doesn't interfere with my critical faculties. If anything, it sharpens them. My hopes make my disappointments all the keener; my hopes make the pleasure keener, too. (1985: xv)

Cultural criticism of media texts "illuminates, enabling us to see a work in a new way" (hooks, 1996: 5). As Jhally and Earp remind us, when advocating the significance of "conceptualizing media education as crucial to democratic citizenship," it is important to note that in no way should one assume "that all media are bad, or that young people and the public more generally must be protected from the so-called evil influences of media images and messages" (2006: 242). On the other hand, a critical media literacy questions representations and stories that promote sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and other oppressive and bigoted forces, a well as the underlying values which mediate and inscribe media culture. In my experience, I have found that students are especially interested in examining the "politics of representation" in a multiplicity of media forms. This enterprise explores positive, negative or ambiguous representations of class, gender, race, sexuality, and other determinants of identity and social stratification (see Hammer and Kellner, 2009: Introduction).

Student engagement with the politics of representation and difference is hardly surprising given the ascendancy of "colorblindness" in much of our contemporary public and private discourse which, like allegations of "political correctness," curtails dialogues about real hierarchies of power and privilege.[12] Patricia Hill Collins asserts that this color-blind mentality, which claims that racism no longer exists, is in fact a racist ideology.[13] The paradoxical nature of this "new racism," as she calls it, "which relies heavily on the manipulation of ideas within mass media," has been especially successful because it

characterizes any racial language (or interrogations about race or ethnicity) as perpetuating racism. As Hill Collins explains it: "Despite protestations to the contrary, this new colorblind racism claimed not to see race yet managed to replicate racial hierarchy as effectively as the racial segregation of old" (2006: 3).[14]

John Downing and Charles Husband describe the insidious manner in which racism has "evolved" and continues to permeate our dominant values and beliefs despite the myth of its extinction. As they so eloquently and emphatically assert: "Racism is a poisonous ideology and a destructive practice. It is predominantly anathemized by states, politicians and populations as a stain on civilized society. And yet, it is virtually endemic. The discourses which vilify racism are more than amply countered by the many other discourses through which racism is made invisible, normative and even virtuous" (2005:1). Hence, the consequences of what Stuart Hall refers to as inferential racism have been especially evident in educational institutions in the United States where the term "political correctness" has been employed by right-wing pundits and mainstream media to demonize and trivialize "those people who were trying to create a more respectful and inclusive environment on campus for groups which have largely been excluded" (Glassner, 1999: 10). According to cultural critic and education scholar Ellen Seiter, "the 'color-blind' model imposed by so many teachers effectively shuts down discussion of a topic—race and racism—that students are struggling with on a daily basis" (2005: 24). She goes on to argue that:

> It is a disservice to students to exclude from classroom discussions issues of class and race that they are negotiating throughout their everyday lives. Instead whiteness is embedded in "colorblindness" discourse, which is "universally framed and has thus sidestepped the issues of racial imbalance implicit in colorblindness."[14] (ibid.)

Unfortunately, this "disservice" is hardly particular to issues of race but also includes the multiple dimensions of identity and culture which necessarily include, but are not exclusive to, relations of class, gender, sexuality, age, and other forms which often intersect with race as well as with one another.[15] Hence, teaching critical media literacy can be, as bell hooks (1994) describes it, a liberatory experience for both teachers and students. Yet, ironically, the dearth of culturally critical media literacy classes, especially those that involve media production, which I will shortly describe, owes much to the general lack of support in regard to the credibility afforded such courses as well as to limited technological resources which are often only available within specialized programs. As noted media and cultural studies scholar David Buckingham puts it:

> I am frustrated by the fact that teachers of media education still seem to be insufficiently recognized and supported. Despite the generally inhospitable climate, there is a great deal of excellent work being done in the field by highly dedicated teachers and committed students. Media education generates a degree of enthusiasm and enjoyment that is all too rare in contemporary schooling; and it offers a form of educational practice that is not just engaging for students, but also intellectually rigorous, challenging and relevant to their everyday lives.
>
> Without being at all uncritical of what goes on, I believe this is something we should affirm and celebrate. (2003: x)

■ Teaching Critical Media Literacy Through Production: Where Theory Meets Praxis

It is within this context that I will discuss a critical media literacy course which I have been teaching for eight years at the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as some of my earlier pedagogical and production experiences which have informed much of its form and content. My current course is a unique one for UCLA, as it is one of the only courses outside of the film school which incorporates a practical component in which students produce a group media project. One of the underlying tenets of the course is to provide students with the opportunities and skills to recognize and speak out against the exclusion of marginalized and progressive voices (which often includes their own) within the mainstream media as well as the dominant factory system of education.

To even attempt to address the politics of representation through a media literacy course, however, necessitates a dialectic of relevant theory and praxis in which students study scholarly critical cultural studies writing, as well as historical and analytic interrogations of a variety of media and new media forms to develop a critical media literacy. It also involves utilizing more technically oriented literature and media on production techniques as well as hands-on instruction in video, webpage, and sometimes PowerPoint production. The emphasis on watching and discussing media texts both inside and outside of the classroom is also a key feature of theoretical and practical exercises which promote media literacy. In fact, my love of film and video—especially documentaries—has shaped many of my own personal and academic choices and pursuits. And even though the seemingly never-ending impediments and sheer unmitigated hassles associated with teaching production-based critical courses (especially this one) can be overwhelming, I think that I persist due to the profound pleasure I take in introducing students to a different way of looking at and thinking about media. It is in this sense that I try to adopt an approach which Buckingham (2003) describes as "making the familiar strange" in which students are asked to look closely at how media texts are constructed as well as how and why they think they were made.

In addition, the course breaks with the dominant university codes which promote individualism and competition and is completely at odds with the "banking system of education." Indeed, a hegemonic, standardized approach to this kind of teaching and learning would destroy the critical, creative and activist dimensions provoked by these kinds of courses. Instead, the pedagogy is based on cooperation, debate, argument and respecting the voices of other members of the group (at least in theory, but like in any collaborative project, differences of opinion can sometimes become acrimonious, although these tend to be resolved on completion of the final production).

Group projects require articulation of difference and then consensus (rather than acquiescence), which provide students with exercises in democratic practice. The class also seeks to enable students to reshape the way they see the world through reading, discussing, producing, and watching critical media. Much of this material is "counter-hegemonic" and contradicts many of the dominant societal beliefs and media codes. One of the most significant aspects of the course is to discuss and investigate how ideological

codes can be subverted. Rather than being restricted to more classical or vulgar explica-
tions of ideology, we attempt to instead recognize its complexities and multidimensional
nature in that it is inscribed both consciously and unconsciously in all of our experiences
of everyday life. As Stuart Hall describes it, "the concept of ideology 'are those images,
concepts and premises…through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make
sense' of some aspect of social existence." For critical media theorists the study of ideol-
ogy is intimately connected to the study of media texts, because they play a major role
in producing and reproducing ideologies" (Dines and Humez, 2003: 4). And one of the
ways to do this is to celebrate how the production of alternative and oppositional media
often gives voice and agency to subaltern people, including marginalized students and
allows them to "talk back."

The development of this course was based on a number of classes I had taught at
other universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s as well as my own experiences as a
grassroots and educational video producer. It is also informed by my transdisciplinary
academic background and research, which includes communications, sociology, feminism,
education, critical race and queer theory, as well as cultural studies and critical media
literacy, and it is these kinds of experiences which inform my classes. Hence, the dialecti-
cal and radical nature of critical media courses, I would argue, indicates that they do not
and cannot conform to a predesigned syllabus but rather are ultimately determined by
the lived and scholarly experiences of the specific instructor. Thus each course is framed
by the individual instructors' own "personalities," and therefore no critical media literacy
courses are alike. For example, the different courses in media literacy described in this
section of the book all reflect the specific interests, experiences, and expertise of the
professor in question. There is thus no one curriculum, teaching plan, or model for critical
literacy courses which, like cultural studies, engage the issues of the day and interests
and goals of the students. As Carmen Luke so aptly describes it:

> A major challenge in developing critical media literacy, however, results from the fact that it
> is not pedagogy in the traditional sense with firmly established principles, a canon of texts,
> and tried and true teaching procedures. It is a democratic pedagogy that involves teachers
> sharing power with students as they join together in the process of unveiling myths and chal-
> lenging hegemony. Moreover, the material of media culture is so polymorphous, multivalent,
> and polysemic, that it necessitates sensitivity to different readings, interpretations, perceptions
> of the complex images, scenes, narratives, meanings, and messages of media culture, which in
> its own ways is as complex and challenging to critically decipher as book culture (cited in
> Kellner and Share, 2007: 17).

Regardless of different approaches, however, critical media literacy is always
related to the "project of radical democracy and concerned to develop skills that will
enhance democratization and civic participation" (Kellner and Share, 2007: 17). It is in
this sense that I will attempt to summarize my experiences and the ways that I've devel-
oped my own critical media literacy courses. I first discovered video in the early '70s
through a non-credit workshop and communications course at Simon Fraser University
in Vancouver (although I had used video for a supplementary school project at York
University in Toronto the year before…and became hooked!). In those days, portable
video systems (called porta-paks[16]) were state of the art and were being used by many

diverse groups and individuals who had not previously had access to this kind of inexpensive media equipment. The porta-pak was hardly portable by today's standards and was comprised of a bulky video reel-to-reel deck which you had to thread by hand and a rather large camera, tripod, battery, and sometimes a separate microphone. Moreover, this early video system only recorded in black and white, and editing was done using reel-to-reel tapes and a grease pencil,[17] which was later replaced by a rudimentary linear computer editing system, which was primarily designed for assemble editing, and cassette videotapes, which we found absolutely miraculous.

Many argue that the field of media production became democratized with the advent of portable videos in that film production was often financially prohibitive (and demanded more sophisticated training and expertise). Artists, dancers, musicians, activists, documentary producers, teachers, and even filmmakers, to name a few, took advantage of this new accessible media form. In fact, the Yippies[18] (a 60s political and social movement, the Youth International Political Party) used video for their campaign to run a pig for president in 1968. Video production classes were also incorporated into many schools including universities. Much of my own video experiences were the result of the availability of this equipment through educational forums.

I taught video in the community and in the university in Canada and worked on a number of grants producing educational videos for many years. I found that doing video often clarified and gave new meaning to many of the theoretical notions I was studying—not only communications, media theory, and cultural studies but also sociological, pedagogical, and feminist concerns. In fact I spent some years in graduate school studying and writing about the complex nature of "ideology," and discovered that critical studies of media and video production helped me to better understand this multileveled process and how deeply it is embedded in the media of everyday life.

For example, the technical codes of film and video production are rarely (if ever) objective and often communicate ideological values and beliefs. High and low camera angle shots can symbolize positions of domination and subordination (for example, *film noir* of the 40s and 50s was infamous for the manner in which it depicted women as evil, employing technical codes of lighting, camera movements, angles, music, and/or sound effects). News magazine programs such as *60 Minutes* often use camera and editing techniques to manipulate audience readings of interviewees (for example, zooming in on a subject's face, especially when they are sweating, can make the interviewee appear to be nervous and dishonest). Richard Nixon learned this lesson the hard way during his unsuccessful presidential campaign against John Kennedy in the 60s. Moreover, I have found that employing these kinds of examples is an essential component of effective critical media pedagogy, and the advent of new media, such as YouTube, for example, makes these especially accessible and provides for far more expansive levels of decoding texts.

Thus, it is crucial that critical media literacy pedagogy identify the ideological codes and dominant and resistant social values and beliefs embedded in media texts in both form and content. Understanding that these kinds of codes often operate at unconscious levels, through symbolic forms, becomes imperative. For example, "semiotics" (the study of signs and codes) also greatly assisted me in my understanding and past and present teaching of media literacy and practice as well as the significance of the symbolic dimen-

sions of media. I began to include these various theoretical ideas and concepts into courses I taught in video production in the late 1980s and mid-'90s in Canada, as well as in those I have been teaching at UCLA for the past eight years, which promote critical media literacy through the dialectics of production and the study of critical theory.

As Steve Goodman (2003), a ground-breaking scholar and activist in education and progressive media, argues: "Such a critical literacy gives students the analytic tools to read a commercial or a movie, and also to understand the big picture: how the media's over-riding objective of getting and satisfying an audience tends to convert politics, warfare, religion, crime, and all aspects of our society into branches of show business" (7). This should also involve "creating spaces and modes of communication that are alternatives to the ratings-driven show business model of media making" (ibid.)

It is within this context that I have tried to teach my students to produce counter-hegemonic video using popular forms like the documentary, advertisements, and commercial and progressive entertainment media, to assist them in recognizing and understanding dominant genre and ideological and technical production codes and to employ or subvert these in their productions of alternative media projects. However, there appears to be a growing opposition in many film and video schools to the production of oppositional or alternative media although we are currently witness to an astonishing rise in radical documentary production by progressive individuals and organizations.[19] Hence, in my courses the theoretical and practical dimensions of critical media literacy, geared towards progressive and resistant forms of portable video production, are of central importance.

For example, I began teaching a course on video production in the 1980s which included theory and praxis and encouraged the students to produce progressive projects which reflected their own "voice," and I have continued to incorporate and expand upon this dialectical pedagogical approach throughout the years. In this earlier course, some of the student assignments, which included the production of anti-commercials and/or anti-"rock videos" (as they were called at the time), demanded that we study technical and popular media's representative symbolic and narrative codes and try to subvert them. Crucially, we must be fortunate enough to have the critical and production resources, which necessarily include, for most of us, technical support—often in the form of paid student or professional "I.T." assistants—as "one of the most effective strategies for teaching critical literacy is for students to create their own media" (Goodman, 2003). It is through this process that they can better understand the multiple layers of data and information which make up the television, videos, magazines, blogs, video/computer games, social networks, wikis, interactive sites and other new media forms which mediate so much of their everyday lives. In this kind of hands-on creative process:

> They can see for themselves how words can be deleted or added to sentences and made to seem as if they had originally been spoken that way; how causes and effects can be made into their opposite; and how perceptions of time, space, power, and history can all be altered without seeming to be. With a critical appreciation, students can understand how the media acts as a frame and a filter on the world while appearing to be a clear window (ibid.)

It was in fact, through my involvement in this production-oriented pedagogical process that I discovered that this practice is one of the most effective, exciting and pleasurable

practices of critical media studies for both students and teachers. In particular, I strongly focus on teaching students documentary production, which is a great format for presenting unconventional, critical or resistant perspectives on a diversity of issues. During the 1960s, a counter-hegemonic documentary movement evolved which often provided the public with alternative views, visions and factual information which was completely at odds with the status quo and "establishment" views. This tradition of alternative documentary engendered by anti-racist, feminist, civil rights, gay and lesbian (and later queer), social activist and other progressive groups has been attempting to transform our views and facilitate humanistic change of contemporary U.S. and global society and was and continues to be a seminal component of my course and encourages students to produce short documentary style projects.

I was so amazed by the commitment and enthusiasm of many of the students and the innovation and creativity of their video projects in the courses I originally taught that I encouraged them to work on a longer project which we viewed as a kind of "scholarly MTV-style video." Many students and teachers have become convinced that an adapted music video format, which employs highly diverse and complex edits, is one of the most effective genres of progressive educational videos. (Indeed, many of the most brilliant Media Education Foundation [MEF] productions, which produce and distribute some of the most entertaining and innovative progressive media employ this kind of format. [*http://www.mediaed.org.*]) To encourage critical video production of this more extensive project, I arranged for the students to get course credit to attend and videotape sessions of the annual Popular Culture Studies conference which was held in Toronto in 1990. This annual scholarly conference had, at the time, literally thousands of participants who presented on a diversity of themes and topics related to popular culture. Since then, its numbers have increased.

Despite a multiplicity and diversity of challenges, we managed to capture a lot of useable footage and presented, a year later at the PCA 1991 conference, a 100-minute montage of highlights of various sessions of the 1990 meetings, which actually took close to a year to complete. (We also won a conference award for the video.) This experience, although highly stressful and incredibly frustrating at times, convinced me of the significance of progressive student media production within the context of critical approaches like cultural studies.

Moreover, introducing undergraduate students to academic pursuits like scholarly conferences—especially those which explore critical themes—is often a revelatory experience for them. Many of the students, for the first time, understood the empowering nature of education, which was at odds with what Paulo Freire characterized as the banking system of education, which, as I've previously discussed, continues, unfortunately, to characterize the dominant pedagogical approach in too many schools and universities.

Many of the students employed rapid, montage style editing and other production techniques specific to music videos and television ads in their media projects, which was considered quite innovative at the time, and this became an important part of my own productions, research, and teaching. (Indeed, this kind of editing was an extremely time-consuming and intensive process, given that we were limited to linear editing systems, and sophisticated edit programs, like "final cut pro" were just a figment of our nerdish

imaginations at the time.) It was, however, largely through this practical process that we began to notice and examine the multiple ideological and technical codes and levels being employed in the semiotics of media texts as well as the multiplicity of ways that meaning could be constructed both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, many of the student exercises, which I developed then and continue to employ, involved watching media without the sound, and in contrast, listening only to the audio dimensions of a variety of media forms. These kinds of assignments are especially useful in learning about iconic and symbolic codes, camera techniques, lighting, etc. as well as the integral and significant role of music and sound effects in different film and video genres. This, in turn, leads us to further examine the hierarchical relations and levels of meaning encoded in media texts. For example, we might ask how important was the music and sound track in meta-communicating about, or providing meaning to the iconic text? Such exercises can thus lead to new kinds of more sophisticated questions about the relationship of technical and ideological forms and substantive meaning encoded and decoded in media culture.

In fact, semiotics, which is loosely described as the study of signs, or the social production of meanings by systems of signs—especially those employed in media texts—continues to be an important component of my current classes on media literacy and cultural studies. And although we can only touch upon it within the larger constraints of the quarter system's 10-week course, some of the most exciting classes have involved group semiotic analyses of media and film. For instance, identifying and decoding some of the technical and ideological codes and symbols in relation to cultural meanings, using examples of *film noir*[20] and advertisements for example, have proved revelatory for demonstrating the complexities and multiplicity of meanings both conscious and unconscious encoded in a diversity of media forms. It is within this context that the realities of the existence of what has been called "the grammar" of film and television make sense in that media include their own set of technical, symbolic, and ideological codes. Moreover, these kinds of exercises not only make these often hidden and unconscious codes and meanings apparent, but lead to further discussions and debates about the social construction of media—including the political, economic, and ideological or "counter-hegemonic" dimensions of media texts and/or oppositional forms. These often passionate and intense conversations also make evident and demonstrate the active role of viewers and how audiences read, or decode, texts differently. bell hooks makes clear the pedagogical rewards of these kinds of non traditional, insurgent practices. As she puts it:

> I have found that students are much more engaged when they are learning how to think critically and analytically by exploring concrete aspects of their reality, particularly their experience of popular culture…teaching theory, I find that students may understand a particular paradigm in the abstract but are unable to see how to apply it to their lives. Focusing on popular culture has been one of the main ways to bridge the gap. (hooks, 1990: 6)

hooks' advice has continued to serve as a mandate for my pedagogical approach to teaching, which I resumed in the late 1990s after finally completing my Ph.D. dissertation (which I had somehow forgotten to finish), pursuing further scholarly research and relocating to Los Angeles where I gained employment as a part-time lecturer in Women's Studies and later Communications, Sociology, Education and Film & Digital Media, at UCLA.[21]

Although, as part of my course load, I had developed an exciting course for women's studies and communications called "Media: Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality" which employed a critical media/cultural studies approach to the study of media culture, I began to consider the possibilities of teaching a critical media course which incorporated both theory and production, as I had done 10 years earlier. This seemed especially relevant, given the importance of the computer and technological revolutions which characterize the new millennium, and the kinds of new media which were evolving in conjunction with these escalating new developments. Given the pervasiveness and influence of media culture many schools and universities were ignoring the very real needs of students to become critically media literate and provide them with the necessary practical skills which would empower them to be media producers as well as consumers. Although some schools have been teaching critical media and production courses to their general under-graduate population, UCLA, for instance, continues to largely restrict television, film, and digital computer media production to its film and television schools. Indeed, at most universities, especially in the U.S. it seems as if "there is an elephant in the room" when it comes to addressing these kinds of urgent and relevant needs.[22] I hadn't realized at the time that for the majority of students and educators in the United States critical media literacy "was not an option." As Jeff Share (2009) explains it: "Unlike educators in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, many in the U.S. are not informed enough about media literacy to even consider it" (37).

For those of you who want to be involved in teaching critical media literacy which incorporates media production, be forewarned that although some universities and colleges have one separate, self-contained instructional media and/or AV center, many have a number of separate media resource centers which are often administrated by different departments, schools, or divisions. In the case of UCLA, most of them appeared to know very little about each other as they were all administered by different divisions, schools, and departments. This came as a real shock for me, as I had been used to working in departments which either had their own resources and or in a centralized audio/visual or instructional media center which could provide all of the production and/or computer resources, as well as technical support. And even though I thought I was especially cognizant of "Murphy's Law"[23] when it came to teaching and doing media production, especially within the university, I have to admit I was not prepared for the multitude of problems associated with the implementation of this course. These kinds of issues are hardly particular to my case but are, unfortunately—as many critical media professors and instructors can attest to—simply the "nature of the beast."

Moreover, "planned obsolescence is the guiding principle of the new technological industries, and educational institutions are poorly situated to bear the costs of constant replacement and upgrading" (Seiter, 2005: 102). Indeed, I have found that this is one of the major impediments to teaching critical media production to students in the university, and—I have to add—the cause of the frustrations so many of us experience in using computers or media technology in the classroom. It is also hardly surprising that given massive cutbacks in education, researchers have found that "computers drain resources from basic education and require so much attention and maintenance that teachers are distracted from working with students" (Goodman, 2003: 12). Furthermore, for some

bizarre reason, many schools and universities assume that most everyone is technically literate, especially teachers and students. Yet as Siva Vaidhy Anathan (2008) asserts:

> As a professor, I am in the constant company of 18–23 year olds. I have taught at both public and private, and I have to report that levels of comfort with, understanding of, and dexterity with digital technology vary greatly within every class. Yet it has not changed in the aggregate in more than 10 years…Every class has a handful of people with amazing skills and a large number who can't deal with computers at all.

She goes on to argue that these kinds of assumptions are also incredibly elitist in that they presume that all students have access to and or experiences with digital technology. In the "olden days," even before the invention of digital technology, the university or college offered technical support, usually in the form of students, who were paid for their services (indeed, this is one of the many jobs I had to support my studies). We knew that even with what we would now perceive as relatively user friendly instructional resources, like VCRS, there would likely be some kind of problem, which would necessitate hands-on assistance. However, in many contemporary universities, including UCLA, technical support staff have been radically downsized. Indeed, although many of the universities continue to fund expensive corporate computer and digital resources, many have decided to cut one of the most indispensable and relatively inexpensive support systems which is mandatory for the effective employment of instructional technology. Investing instead in so-called "smart classrooms," and developing costly on-line tutorials have undermined many of the benefits of digital instructional resources, which are deemed no longer necessary. This has become a serious problem at UCLA, especially in relation to my critical production course. Indeed, given the budgetary crisis, it appears that even instructional workshops, taught by student experts will be radically reduced, or cease to exist. That there is a critical need for progressive teaching and expert technical assistance speaks for the future of critical media literacy courses, at all educational levels. Yet, without a progressive approach to pedagogy, which eshews standardized methods and employs digital instructional resources in interactive and democratic manners, new technologies can actually further advance and make more expedient the promotion and maintenance of the banking system of education, which has proven to impede the kinds of critical thinking abilities which contemporary students so desperately require. As, Steven Goodman insists:

> Despite the exaggerated claims that have historically been made about the power of technology in the classroom, it has made a marginal difference to instruction in most schools due to the prevalent teacher-centered pedagogy and 'factory' like institutional structures (2003: 13).

Further, as Jhally and Lewis (2006) so insightfully explain it, we have to distinguish between media literacy, which can tend to celebrate the institutions of commercial media, contrasted to critical media literacy alternative modes of production which provoke critical thinking and empowerment: "It is sometime assumed, for example, that a practical knowledge of video production on its own will help demystify the world of television, necessarily promoting a more analytical, critical perspective. There is, however, little evidence to support such an assumption. On the contrary, we have found that students are apt to be seduced by the form, to try to imitate commercial television and, when their

efforts fall short, to regard the work purely in terms of their aesthetic or technical prowess" (232).

Without doubt, introducing new technologies into the classroom to empower students to produce their own works involves ongoing challenges, as I discovered in organizing my present course. After some effort, I managed to find a few digital 8 and mini-dv cameras from the university's Audio Visual Department as well as from the Educational Technology Unit (ETU) at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Fortunately, having the course cross-listed with education and women's studies had major benefits in that it allowed me to utilize resources from a number of support centers which would ordinarily be exclusive to those disciplines which fund them. I also discovered an amazing facility called the Instructional Media Production Lab (IMPL), which was part of the Office of Instructional Development (OID), which is not to be confused with the Instructional Media Lab (IML) which houses an incredible film and video library and facility where students can study these media. The IMPL was a godsend and one of the most valuable facilities on campus. Unbelievably, this resource center was a combined lab and classroom directed by a highly experienced educator and producer which provided the students with portable hard-drives (to store video), computer editing systems and a variety of software, including professional microphones and soundproof rooms for voice overs and narration. Moreover, it employed student experts to teach and assist the students with web page production and editing programs as well as a diversity of other media production systems. Furthermore it served all undergraduate and graduate students at UCLA (including the film and TV schools!). After many meetings and description of technical assignments, students were taught Dreamweaver for webpage production and Final Cut Pro for editing. The lab could accommodate about 20 students and I scheduled a one-hour lab for each week, plus students could work on their productions in this facility at other times. However, what was bizarre….had to be separately booked through AV. They did eventually take on the responsibilities of checking out cameras and assist students with basic camera set up, and later on the lab's director personally taught a session on shooting skills.

The three-hour seminar component of the course was taught in the Ed school; however, there were some problems with the playback facilities, at least for me, as the DVD/VCR and monitors were bolted to the ceiling of the room, which made access especially difficult for those of us who are "height challenged." But this was a minor impediment. Later on, the Ed department designed a media "smart" classroom, which I continue to use, although due to various "quirks" in the system it was, initially, a nightmare and required constant technical assistance, which was readily available.

Unfortunately, thanks in large part to Arnold Schwarzenegger's California state educational cutbacks, the Instructional Media Production Center was, to my horror, "disappeared" in 2003. After a series of complex negotiations I did manage, to employ the resources of the Computer Library Instructional Computing Commons (CLICC) in UCLA's College Library for the production labs, although CLICC's mandate was designed to facilitate a multiplicity of computer needs. They did provide me with computers and laptops, as well as some paid student assistants who were available to advise some of the students on their projects, although they were not allowed to teach the labs. And

many of these assistants, provided excellent advice and help in regards to technological problems, when they were available. CLICC also regularly scheduled workshops in a variety of areas, which included Dreamweaver (for web page production) I-Movie (a much easier and more user-friendly editing software program) as well as photoshop, to name a few, which were open to all students and faculty. Some of the staff also set up some special tutorial times to meet with students outside of the class.

Given that I lacked familiarity with these programs, having missed the computer transformation in digital editing, I managed to solicit the services of two of the leading technicians, who were employed by ETU (the Educational Technology Unit) to teach Dreamweaver and I-Movie in the CLICC labs, over a three-week period. Needless to say, this was not part of their job description, and they did so, often on their own time and as a favor. These techs were brilliant instructors who had the capacities to clearly explain and demonstrate these programs and designed their labs in a manner which provided the students with the technical expertise they required to successfully complete their projects. Although, a number of people have the expertise in these areas, teaching others how to employ them takes special talents. Unfortunately, one of the techs was no longer available to teach the Dreamweaver lab, but to my amazement I was directed to another media resource center (which I had no idea existed) which served Information Sciences, and due to their affiliation with Education, one of the technicians agreed to take over this class.

Initially, CLICC did not own or provide fire wire (hard drives) on which the productions depended and I somehow convinced OID (the Office of Instructional Development) to loan me theirs. Eventually, CLICC did purchase fire wire drives, although they cannot accommodate all of their production courses simultaneously. Hence, those of us involved in production try to schedule our courses in different quarters. Moreover, this is also the case with the finite number of cameras available through AV. CLICC also purchased a large number of laptop computers which can be checked out by any UCLA students (for a limited time period), and the students in my class can also work in the CLICC labs when they are not being used for other classes. They can also use the computers and work on their productions in the ETU labs (although this is not always feasible given the constant updating of programs, which means that often the different computers in different labs, as well as those owned by students, don't have compatible software).

I later discovered that there were instructional equipment grants available for full time faculty (which like most grants, required very specific information and were quite time consuming to prepare). It was only due to the assistance of staff members of Women's Studies that we were able to complete and submit them. Given that I am a part-time lecturer, the Chair(s) of Women's Studies co-sponsored these applications and I was awarded 3 of these, within a 5-year period, which allowed me to purchase one professional and two inexpensive consumer quality cameras, a desktop computer for women's studies and funding for a Teaching Assistant who has both theoretical and practical experiences and shares in the many complex responsibilities associated with the multiple dimensions involved in this complicated course. AV also replaced its outdated 8 video cameras with similar camcorders which I had purchased through the grant. And Women's Studies independently purchased 2 more camcorders for use in this class. Indeed, the course had become impossible to teach and organize without a Teaching Assistant and

is no longer feasible without TA support. Thus, I have been especially fortunate in that they all have been exceptional, and dedicated to the class, its students, and mandate. Moreover, all of these TAs have continued to pursue or complete their graduate degrees as well as be actively involved in alternative and independent media productions. Regrettably, OID rejected my last grant application and it is highly unlikely that they will support any others. However, Women's Studies provided me with part-time TA support for the course last year.

Initially, the Social Science Computing Center (SSC) also provided services to teach student web page production and are largely responsible for assisting me in the design of my course web page as well as streaming all of the student videos for online viewing. Indeed, many of the administrators and resource people in the various technical centers, and staff of the departments which co-sponsor the course have been incredibly supportive of the class and often attend the screenings of the students' final presentations.

Unfortunately, the limited resources do constrain enrollment and also time constraints and access to equipment reduce the amount of original footage the students can produce. Hence, I encourage them to use media to critique media, and many of the videos and web sites employ these kinds of techniques.[24] Although Women's Studies in particular has committed to on-going support of this course, cutbacks seriously threaten the future of this and other kinds of courses. Indeed, a number of universities are no longer replacing or increasing the kinds of educational resources which provide for interactive, creative and critical student productions. Instead, it appears that many universities are investing in highly expensive technology designed for pod-casting standardized lectures. As Henry Giroux (2007) describes it, "The turn toward downsizing and deskilling faculty is also exacerbated by the attempts on the part of many universities to expand upon the profitable market of 'distance education' whose online courses reach thousands of students" (123). Many experts have argued that higher education is being radically restructured "under the imperatives of the new digital technologies and the move into distance education" (ibid.).

I find it astonishing that, given all of the dramas associated with this course and the corporate universities' decisions to cut back on particular kinds of instructional technology, that I have managed to survive and maintain its standards for 8 years. Student feedback indicates that the course has become increasingly popular and the demand increases with each year. While it is difficult to describe all of the complex and multi-leveled dimensions of the course, I believe that its success and importance are best communicated through the student productions themselves. Hence, I am including a link to the course web site which includes the course syllabus, and some of the student projects. http://www.sscnet. ucla.edu/08W/womencm178–1/.

In regards to format, the course has a a three-hour seminar and a one-hour lab each week. Due to the nature of the assignments (especially the counter-hegemonic critical group media production) students spend a large amount of time on the projects. I have, however, only had one person drop out of the course since its tenure, although I do lose a few students after the first class when they hear what is involved and the amount of time it takes to produce a media project. This is even more astounding given that I just recently learned, after consulting with a number of students, that they spend about 80 hours outside of the class, on their productions, and how, when challenged and offered

the opportunities to engage in these kinds of creative, oppositional projects, their obsession with grades is suppressed by their pride and passion for learning. Because I believe so strongly in the dialectic of theory and practice, the students are required to do particular readings from the course reader as well as produce a short analytical final paper in which they discuss their group project within the context of critical media literacy. They are asked to incorporate course readings, guest lectures, and films presented in the class. Notions of ideology and hegemony as well as the "politics of representation" in media (which includes dimensions of sexism, racism, classism and homophobia, to name a few) are central concerns. Also the ideas and realities of resistance, social and political change, and agency are emphasized.

The assignments include a camera technique and editing exercise, a basic web page, and a brief storyboard, as well as the final take-home paper and group alternative media project. The three-hour seminar is comprised of short lectures and discussions related to the required readings, guest lectures, and presentations of excerpts from a variety of different genres of media—primarily alternative and usually documentary style. Different genres of films are also discussed and analyzed.

Some of the films and or videos I have shown include excerpts from classic cinéma vérité such as Frederick Wiseman's *High School* (1968) and Albert and David Maysles' *Gimme Shelter (1970)* ; feminist/labor documentaries, which embrace dimensions of oral history, like Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA* (1977) and Julia Reichert, James Klein and Miles Mogulescu's *Union Maids* (1977). I also lecture and discuss the significance of the new cinema or cinéma vérité movement, and how it has influenced more contemporary alternative documentaries and films. Excerpts are presented from some National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentaries; music videos like the classic Michael Jackson *Thriller* (1982); mockumentaries like Rob Reiner's *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984); Mark Lewis's satirical classic *Cane Toads: An Unnatural History* (1988); and Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman (*1996) to name a few. I always include excerpts from a variety of Michael Moore films, Errol Morris television and film productions, as well as a diversity of media from alternative media organizations, such as MEF (Media Education Foundation) and Women Make Movies (WMM, which have included Chyng Sun's remarkable *The Mickey Mouse Conspiracy: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power* (2001); Sut Jhally's and Jackson Katz's *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and Masculinity* (2001) and, of course, Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women* (2001) as well as such independent films as Ngozi Onwurah's *And Still I Rise* (1993), *Slaying the Dragon* (1988) and *The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of the Latino Image in Hollywood Films* (2002) and some of the works of Marlon Riggs (to name a few).

There are approximately 50 films and videos on reserve for the course, which students can watch on campus or online due to the wizardry of the UCLA Instructional Media Library Collections and their video furnace (although they have limited me to 30 for the online portion of the class) as well as present (or invite students to present) student videos from previous courses. In addition, I present some of my own work if there is time and also show some instructional production videos on camera techniques, lighting, sound, and editing. I try to keep up with new cutting-edge works and am constantly updating the films used in the course as well as those I put on reserve. Some of my more recent

favorites include Errol Morris's 2008 *Standard Operating Procedure,* about the Abu Ghraib scandal; Jonathan Caouettes' 2004 video *Tarnation* (which was edited entirely on I-Movie and was produced for a total cost of $218.32, incorporating super 8, home videos, photographs, and found images); Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbot and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation,* (2003) Robert Greenwald's *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* (2005), as well as excerpts from a number of his *Brave New Films* Productions and Morgan Spurlock's *Supersize Me* (2004), as well as some of his other docs. I try to include a diversity of films which are produced by and present marginalized peoples and their particular standpoints. Needless to say, these films have promoted many provocative discussions.

In particular, I stress the importance of editing and show examples from classic films, like Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), to demonstrate the significance of good editing as well as how editing constructs meaning. In this session I also present a brilliant example of this in the form of a subversive re-edit" (of George Bush's 2003 State of the Nation address) and add, which is available on YouTube.

Guest speakers and presentations have included a number of the contributors to this book including Jeff Share (UCLA), who has constructed a provocative PowerPoint presentation on media literacy (he is a former student of the class); Douglas Kellner (UCLA) on Emile de Antonio, alternative public access television, and blogging; Leah Lievrouw (UCLA) on alternative and activist New Media. We are incredibly fortunate that a number of progressive film and video makers have agreed to generously share their expertise and offer advice as well as present excerpts from their own works throughout the years, especially given that I can offer them very little, if any, remuneration. These have included Joan Sekler, the co-producer, director, and writer for the award-winning 2002 documentary *Unprecedented: the 2000 Presidential Election,* feminist documentary filmmaker Sara Mora Ivicevich, who is associated with a number of independent media forums, including Women Make Movies, and is also a graduate of this course; Tommy Palotta, independent producer, director, and writer who has worked, in a variety of capacities on such cult classics as *Slacker* (1991); *Waking Life* (2001), and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006). In the winter quarter of 2009 multitalented and award-winning director, producer, writer, and actor Stuart Gordon presented excerpts from his films, and discussed a diversity of fascinating topics related to commercial and independent media and production techniques, as well as the role of documentary formats in a variety of films.

Since the course incorporates such a multiplicity of areas I put together a reader that organizes critical media literacy according to four major sections (which was in itself a daunting exercise). Supplemental readings both recommended and required are included on the course website under online readings and are regularly updated. I assign what I believe to be a manageable amount of pages of readings, given the real kinds of time constraints, and what I believe to be often unrealistic volume of readings required for other courses, and number of assignments which characterize most undergraduates' experiences. The total average of required readings for my course is generally 300–350 pages over a 10-week period, and I find that the majority of my students manage to complete most if not all of the required readings as well as a large percentage of the recommended texts. Since the lectures, guest lectures, seminars, discussions, media presentations and technical and production techniques reference the course texts, it is essential

that the students be adequately prepared. Due to the nature of the course and multiple dimensions of cultural studies and critical media literacy the course reader is broken down into four interrelated sections:

"Foundational Readings" includes key theoretical readings on critical media literacy and cultural studies. The text includes articles by bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Robert McChesney, Douglas Kellner, Zillah Eisenstein as well as some of my own. There are also a number of articles on semiotics, the internet, cyberspace, political economy of media as well as various dimensions of media criticism in this section.

The second section is called "Film/Video Makers: Practical Dimensions" and is comprised of articles about cinéma vérité, feminist documentaries, and particularly activist filmmakers such as Emile de Antonio and Frederick Wiseman.

The third section of the reader addresses "Practical/Technical Skills" and contains readings on production techniques.

The Final Section is called "Critical Media Literacies and Cultural Studies: Selected Topics." It is designed to help students in formulating topics for their group productions. It includes articles on a diversity of topics related to media culture, including writings on cyberschooling, music videos, Barbie, Disney, and McDonald's as well as fan and hate sites on the internet.

Student projects have included websites as well as a number of short video montages which interrogate representations of gender, race, and heterosexism in a variety of media forms. They produce different documentary genres which include interviews, narrations and voice-overs (see http://women.ucla.edu/faculty/hammer/cm178/) and use media to critique media and produce their own alternatives. This course provides the opportunity to incorporate a diversity of student "voices" into media production, as well as to apply critical thinking to dominant media forms and contemporary social life. The goal is therefore to empower students and to provoke them to become informed, democratic citizens who can question hegemonic corporate media and society and produce their own alternative cultural forms. This course thus enables students to be active participants in their society and serves the ends of participatory democracy.

Indeed, as Aronowitz argues: "Redefining power democratically entails, at its core, interrogating the concept of 'representation'" (2008: 178). Hence, it is hardly surprising that many of the students choose to present their own standpoints and "voice" in regards to the politics of representation, in their media productions, which often include critiques of dominant institutions, media and ideology. Moreover, the enthusiasm and pride they take in their productions are contagious. And it is within this context that there is a revolutionary shift in student and faculty attitudes, which transform the classroom into a challenging, provocative and entertaining forum. As bell hooks describes it, to take "pleasure in teaching is an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience" (1994:10).

Although teaching courses in critical media literacy that involve production can be stressful to say the least, I encourage others to consider teaching courses which incorporate theory and practice and teaching media literacy through production. From my own experience, it is clear that student appreciation makes teaching critical media literacy through

production extremely gratifying. It is also valuable to the students in that experience in media production is becoming a mandatory requirement for many jobs, as well as work in teaching and the community which requires that one be experienced in media production and literacy. Many of the students who have taken my course are presenting their work in classes, conferences and festivals. Some have employed their media productions in their graduate research which further qualifies them for academic positions which increasingly require expertise in new media literacies. Others have successfully pursued careers in both mainstream and alternative media. Thus, critical media literacy courses can assist students in many intellectual and practical ways.

Finally, critical media/cultural studies empowers us to recognize and interrogate the highly persuasive powers of media culture in shaping public opinion and reinforcing dominant ideological values and beliefs. At the same time, an activist media/cultural studies demonstrates the potential of alternative, critical and oppositional media to promote democratization and global social justice.

Notes

1. I would like to especially thank Douglas Kellner and also Loran Marsan for her critical reading of this chapter, as well as the valuable insights she provided in this regard. I'd also like to acknowledge all of her contributions to the critical media literacy course I am discussing later on in this chapter, in her capacities as teaching assistant (and/or associate) for this class.

2. Many would argue that grades have become almost meaningless in that studies reveal that grade inflation is escalating in both private and public institutions (Notebook, 2003). One such report by professors Henry Rosovsky and Mathew Hartley demonstrates that there is no correlation between higher grades, which have now become the norm, and the quality of the student's work, through their analysis of "trends in SAT scores and grade point averages over the last 40 years" (Lee, 2002). Indeed, there was some cause for alarm when 91 percent of Harvard University's class of 2001 graduated with honors" (Roarty, 2004). Linguist chair Stephen Anderson, who has taught at both Yale and Harvard, asserts that: "There was a feeling that everyone who was [at Harvard] deserved an 'A.' It was much more automatic to give people high grades at Harvard" (Lee, 2008). Changing values and attitudes and increasing emphasis on competition and credibility through material commodity products (including high grades and a brand name degree)which underlie our educational system, have created an atmosphere in which "[f]or many students, being average in the classroom is unacceptable. Receiving mostly A's and B's not only have become the norm, but it's become an expectation…(Roarty, 2004).

3. The market logic which has transformed public education into a commercial enterprise has proven incredibly profitable for particular individuals (such as the upper echelons of college and university administrators), as well as a variety of business enterprises, which not only include multiple sites which evaluate faculty and academic institutions, but also a diversity of organizations which "rank" universities. However, it is the so-called "standards movement," which is based on high-stake tests and exams (such as SATs) which has become an exceedingly lucrative business. Ironically, while we are witnessing draconian cut-backs to, and downsizing of, resources necessary to address basic educational standards, and hence a scandalous escalation of illiteracy in the United States, "*there is no shortage of money for private corporations that are making huge profits on school systems. High stakes testing, a form of privatization, transfers huge amounts of public money to publishers, testing organizations, and large consulting companies*" (ibid. 21–22 *emphasis mine).*

4. This is not to say that grades are not important, as they continue to be a key consideration for scholarships and acceptance to graduate programs and professional schools. However, in contemporary corporate culture and a highly competitive job market, the quality of one's education is

determined almost exclusively by one's school's 'credentials,' or "rank" rather than grades. And within an econometric model, where the quality of a credential is measured in "the number of jobs and salaries offered to recent graduates," then Harvard, Yale, and other Ivy League schools are the best. As Stanley Aronowitz explains it: "The credential, rather than the various standards of academic evaluation, thus becomes the crucial criterion of the worth and standing of a university." (Aronowitz, 2000: 58). It is within this context that services like Campus Buddy, which attempt to quantify education in monetary terms, have it completely wrong, for it would be the "diploma" rather than grades which would more accurately personify the salary allegory. Barbara Ehrenreich (2007) has a more specific but prescient explanation of why both the corporate university and the businesses they cater to prefer this vocational training model of education. As she puts it: "My theory is that employers prefer college grads because they see a college degree chiefly as a mark of one's ability to obey and conform. Whatever else you learn in college, you learn to sit still for long periods while appearing to be awake. And whatever else you do in a white collar job, most of the time you'll be sitting and feigning attention. Sitting still for hours on end—whether in library carrels or office cubicles—does not come naturally to humans. It must be learned—although no college has yet been honest enough to offer a degree in seat warming."

5. See, for example, Barbara Ehrenreich's brilliant investigative report and memoir *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* in which she describes this horrifying reality within the context of 1998.

6. As Nemko notes: "Perhaps worst of all even those who do manage to graduate too rarely end up in careers that require a college education. So it's not surprising that when you hop into a cab or walk into a restaurant, you're likely to meet workers who spend years and their family's life savings on college, only to end up with a job they could have done as a high school dropout" (Nemko, 2008). Even before the 'great depression' of 2008, for the majority of jobs available to graduates "a liberal arts, business, or administration degree provides no special qualifications which relieve the employer of the obligation to train. Most employers say they want school-leavers to have a degree, be able to read and write, follow oral and written instructions, and be fairly articulate. From their perspective, the B.A. signifies that the candidate can tolerate boredom and knows how to follow rules, probably the most important lesson in postsecondary education" (Aronowitz, 2008:10).

    Moreover, as Barbara Ehrenreich (2007) insightfully notes, there is yet another factor which makes a graduate even more appealing to these kinds of employers: "maybe what attracts employers to college grads is the scent of desperation. Unless your parents are rich and doting, you will walk away from commencement with a debt averaging $20,000 and no health insurance. Employers can safely bet that you will not be a trouble-maker, a whistle-blower or any other form of non-'team-player.' You will do anything. You will grovel." (Ehrenreich, ibid.) In fact, the deleterious consequences of the mounting debt facing so many graduates forces them to reject low-paying but vital professions, like teachers, social workers, journalists, pro bono lawyers, environmentalists, artists, secondary medical professionals and community workers, because they can't earn enough to pay back their loans (Von Hoffman, 2006).

7. Indeed, Aronowitz and others argue that this kind of banking system of education renders invisible the real nature of a neoliberal, corporate system, which is predicated on a "politics of greed," which is fundamentally at odds with a democratic system which finds its basis in the "common good." As he explains it, "the American workplace has virtually no room for dissent and individual or collective initiative not sanctioned by management. The corporate factory, which includes sites of goods and symbolic production alike, is perhaps the nation's most authoritarian institution" (2008: 17). He goes on to argue, as do a number of other experts, that contemporary corporatized schooling is predicated on an ideology of authoritarianism and intimidation. "Children of the working and professional and middle classes are to be molded to the industrial technological imperatives of contemporary society. Students learn science and mathematics not as a discourse of liberation from myth and religious superstition but as a series of algorithms, the master of which is presumed to improve the student's logical capacities, with no aim other than fulfilling academic requirements. In most places the social studies do not emphasize the choices between authoritarian and democratic

forms of social organization, or democratic values, particularly criticism and renewal, but instead are disseminated as bits of information that have little significance for the conduct of life" (ibid: 16).

8. This kind of complacency, which seems to characterize the majority of the citizens of the United States, is especially puzzling, given the active and successful collective challenges to government policies in the past, as was the case with the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Many would argue that the generally defeatist attitudes, of so many of us, in relation to the escalation of criminal and anti-democratic policies and practices, especially since 9/11, and the current collapse of our economic system are provoked, in large part by what Naomi Klein (2007) has described as the rise of disaster capitalism, "the rapid-fire corporate restructuring of societies" engineered by a neo-conservative elite, who made it appear as if "the global free market triumphed democratically" (np). And one of the most ominous consequences of this has been the obliteration of many of our constitutional rights, including the guarantees of a free press. As leading communications and economics scholar and activist Robert McChesney (2001) explains it: "Over the past two decades, as a result of neoliberal deregulation and new communication technologies, the media systems across the world have undergone a startling transformation. There are now fewer and larger companies controlling more and more, and the largest of them are media conglomerates, with vast empires that cover numerous media industries. Hence, "many of our most trenchant critics warn that the most serious threat to democracy is coming from the very press charged with protecting it" as media are "ruled by the agenda-setting power of privately owned media corporations" (Schechter, 2005: 16). Yet, this is an issue which is hardly ever discussed in the media, nor is the collaboration of politicians and political agencies, who are responsible for this kind of corporate concentration. Indeed one of the "core problems of the media system" which has been identified as "inadequate journalism and hypercommercialization" is, in fact, "linked to the commercial structures of the media and how these structures are directly and indirectly linked to explicit government polices" which have been implemented in "the public's name but without the public's consent" (McChesney, 2004: 11).

9. In fact radical increases in government and corporate spending on "technological literacy" in universities are having dire consequences for humanities programs. For example, a 1998 mission statement called "Engaging the Future" at George Mason University in Virginia "calls for increasing investment in information technology and tightening relations between the university and northern Virginia's booming technology industry" (Press and Washburn, 2000). By the end of 1998, the president had "added degree programs in information technology and computer science, poured money into the 125-acre Prince William Campus, whose focus is biosciences, bioinformatics, biotechnology, and computer and information technology, and suggested that all students pass a 'technology literacy' test. Amid the whirlwind of change, however, other areas fared less well. Degree programs in classics, German, Russian and several other humanities departments were cut." (ibid.) Nationwide, funding and support for the humanities, the liberal arts, and the social sciences have been neglected, while there has been an escalating increase in support for information and computing sciences, as well as business and "the hard sciences." And even though there have been mass demonstrations and protests from students from all over the United States opposing the growing corporatization of the university and demanding democratic participatory rights, we rarely hear about this in the mainstream academic or popular media. (see, for example, SDS http://studentsforademocraticsociety.org/home/).

10. See, for example, the fascinating discussions of students on different dimensions of media posted at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GC4QCrp8xs which is part of the exciting project of Professor Mark Auslander's and the Cultural Production Program at Brandeis University's new media channel at http://hk.youtube.com/culturalproduction.

11. As black feminist cultural critic bell hooks so insightfully explains it: "If we were always and only 'resisting spectators,' to borrow a literary phrase, then films would lose their magic. Watching movies would feel more like work than pleasure. Again and again I find myself stressing to students,

to nonacademic readers, that thinking critically about a film does not mean that I have not had pleasure in watching the film" (1996: 4).

12. For an excellent analysis of how "political correctness," or "PC," was used to silence progressive critics of sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice, see Glassner (1999: 9ff.)

13. Patricia Hill Collins describes *ideology* as "a body of ideas reflecting the interests of a particular social group. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism all have ideologies that support social inequality. Ideologies are never static and always have internal contradictions" (2005: 351). And as Bill Nichols so aptly describes it: "Ideology uses the fabrications of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have" (1981:1) .

14. The Seiter quotation is drawn from black feminist Audrey Thompson's 1996 article "Not the color purple: Black feminist lessons for educational caring."

15. "Intersectionality" is a notion and theoretical framework which is central to any understanding of the politics of representation. Briefly put, intersectionality is an "analysis claiming that systems of race, economic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation and age form mutually constructing features of social organization." (Hill Collins, 2005: 351)

16. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portapak.

17. For an explanation of this form of editing, please see: http://books.google.com/books?id=vIgN0vF sI4cC&pg=PA5&lpg=PA5&dq=video+editing,+grease+pencil&source=bl&ots=BOtTuzb3qj&sig= stsYd_j8xFakztAN2h259uXZkSg&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=7&ct=result.

18. On the Yippies, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yippies.

19. Recent progressive documentaries include the work of Michael Moore; the Media Education Foundation [MEF]; Robert Greenwald's Brave New Films; Women Make Movies; PBS programs like *Frontline* and *Independent Lens,* as well as a wealth of documentaries available on a variety of cable channels and web sites and through mainstream services like Netflicks and even Blockbuster.

20. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_noir.

21. As Stanley Aronowitz (2008) explains it, "The part-timer is typically not a regular member of the tenure-bearing faculty. She is hired on a semester or at best a yearly, basis and except where collective bargaining has provided some continuity of employment, may be discharged at the will of a department chair or other academic officer....Now at a time when only 20 percent of of recent faculty positions are tenure track, the [part-timer, sometimes described as] adjunct has become the bedrock of the curriculum. In some public and private universities and colleges alike, 40–60 percent of courses are taught by part-timers. In turn, since adjunct rates are not prorated to full-time salaries, in order to make a living the part-timer teaches more than a full load, frequently racing from department to department of campus to campus to make a living [if they can find enough work](xv).... In no way would I deny the quality of adjunct teachers or their dedication to the educational enterprise. In the overwhelming majority of instances, finding oneself in the subaltern position of part-time instructor has nothing to with ability or even achievement. Many part-timers are superb teachers, accomplished authors, and skilled mentors. If about 70 percent of those who seek employment as professors are destined for part-time status, their fate is not chiefly their own doing except for the decision to remain in college teaching regardless of the circumstances that reduce them to poorly paid contractors…" (xvi). Needless to say, this varies, as the status and salaries of part-timers are largely dependent upon the strength of their unions (if they have one at all). For example, in Canada, although hardly ideal, part-timers have far greater security and better wages–due in large part to their unions—than most of those of us in the United States.

22. The *New York Times* published an article, by Elizabeth Van Ness, "Is Cinema Studies the New MBA?," May 6, 2005, which addresses the significance of media literacy for contemporary students.

23. Murphy's law is an adage in Western culture that broadly states, "if anything can go wrong, it will." It is also cited as: "If there's more than one possible outcome of a job or task, and one of those

outcomes will result in disaster or an undesirable consequence, then somebody will do it that way"; "Anything that can go wrong, will," the similar "Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong," or, "Whatever can go wrong will go wrong, and at the worst possible time, in the worst possible way." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murphy's_law).

24. Unfortunately, many universities in the United States are no longer purchasing media equipment for student or instructional use, usually citing budgetary constraints. Ironically, these constraints have not curtailed the acquisition of highly sophisticated and obscenely expensive media and information technology which allows for the "pod casting" of courses for registered students to access these classes on line. As Aronowitz notes: "If this trend gains momentum, we may witness in our lifetimes an educational regime in which only a tiny minority of students and professors enjoy the luxury of classroom learning while the immense majority earns credentials without seeing a single live professor or conversing in person with fellow students" (2008: 80).

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