

Chapter 19

Unlocking the Liberation Doctrine in Media Literacy and Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

By considering some of the limits of the media literacy movement to date, such as lack of full implementation at colleges and universities and the virtual absence of awareness of media literacy and its concepts among the general population, this chapter provides an overview of the potential themes of liberation and emancipation as they relate to media literacy in higher education environments, and explores the pathways of liberation and education pedagogy by reframing the approach to teaching and learning in the context of critical education, the end of oppression and ultimately increased social justice. The exploration of the intersection of themes of liberation and media literacy, community education and reality pedagogy each play an important role in examining the ways that dominant narratives have factored into the lack of full absorption of media literacy today. This literary analysis seeks to provide suggestions for a pathway forward from the existing quandary.

INTRODUCTION

In the event that the reader has not fully come to understand the importance or the imperative nature of media literacy in higher education environments, consider the following: *Media literacy equals justice*. Media literacy equals the end of hegemonic media dominance, cultural appropriation, racial, sexual and class stereotypes, misinformation, sensationalism, “fake news”, media monopolies, duopolies and oligopolies and the resultant barriers to entry for the economically disenfranchised, it also allows for the open and unfettered access to the Internet, and the end of the “digital divide”. The media literacy “movement” today is at the crossroads of its existence and in a critical state of affairs calling for urgent action. Stated bluntly, the media literacy movement must find its soul—*its moral compass*. It is generally accepted by media literacy scholars (Aufderheid & Firestone, 1993; Hobbs, 1998, 2010, Kellner

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& Share, 2007; NAMLE, 2007; Potter, 2011) that media literacy is designed to empower the citizenry and media audiences, yet as media literacy moves along at a less than rapid pace as media becomes ever more powerful and dominant, the messages of the “movement” require further analysis and a forthright approach that examines power imbalances and structural realities (Kline, 2016; Lewis & Jhally, 1998).

First, in spite of and regarding the dominance of all things media, the media consumer is akin to a young reader of children’s books who does not yet know how to read and has not grasped the full concept of the meaning letters and words and how they are used to make meaning and provide information—*literacy*. Instead, this young reader is forced to make meaning by studying and consuming images or “pictures” which are imbedded into the text. In this process the young “soon-to-be” reader may in fact understand and follow the main principles of the story and understand the primary points. However, because reading and writing skills—*literacy*, is not there, there is little to no understanding of the intention and very little ability to understand such a concept. This is where valuable and directed nuances and meaning are lost in this process through a lack of understanding in the absence of such literacy. Today’s media consumer can find him/herself in the same place in most instances. Audiences are typically less aware of these media effects and if the media they consume are good or bad, effective, helpful or useful, or designed to deceive or compel particular action, created by someone who shares the same values, ideas and beliefs or even shares their culture. These various nuances cannot truly be known with casual consumption for entertainment and informational purposes. In theory, this liberation doctrine serves as the backdrop of media literacy education.

Without full-scale media literacy, there can be no liberation for the oppressed as media is now the primary conduit of the Western controlled and dominated worldview. Accordingly, the hegemonic outlay of media via cultural, political and economic slant of the dominant culture, which is collectively understood as “globalization”, seeks to continue toward singularity of culture, government and commerce (Lull, 2011; Mihailidis, 2013; Thoman & Jolls, 2004).

Accordingly, works in this volume offer numerous examples for higher education instructors to implement media literacy into existing curricula. Themes found in previous chapters have provided examples of the ways in which media literacy can be introduced in the college and university curriculum.

The need to wait or undergo major curriculum changes notwithstanding, professors and instructors can add media literacy to the curriculum today. Further, as media literacy concepts and principles are introduced a consideration of liberation and emancipatory themes can be incorporated into the process. Given the charged and politicized nature of education, literacy and media as concepts, the mere discussion and suggestive themes related to both media literacy in higher education naturally evoke themes of liberation and emancipation (Jhally & Earp, 2007; Thevenin, 2012a.) Most of the chapters in this volume indirectly treat these concepts. Several chapters outlined below address emancipation and liberation directly and they include,

Olson and Scharrer in Chapter 7 outline the benefits of service learning and public engagement by highlighting some of the practices involved with introducing media literacy to K-12 programs via university students who are studying communications. Such collaborative experiences serve as a springboard to full media literacy as it enhances media literacy education for university students who in turn strengthen their own knowledge base as they introduce the topic to secondary school students in their community. Such programs not only allow for strengthened media literacy skills but they also provide an important opportunity for reflection of best practices and interpretation of participant outcomes at the secondary and post-secondary level.

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