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**Montreal High School Teachers
Talking “Media”:
The Elaboration of a “Communication Perspective”**

by
Natalie Frank, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
January 4, 1999

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**Montreal High School Teachers Talking "Media":
The Elaboration of a "Communication Perspective"**

submitted by Natalie Frank, B.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

January, 1999

Abstract

This study examines how a set of assumptions articulated by a group of Montreal area media educators who deal with secondary level education can coalesce into a “communication perspective”. The communication perspective is defined by an antifoundationalist approach to reality. It is, in addition, usefully called a *communication* perspective because such an antifoundationalist approach can be seen to underscore many of the recent developments in theories of communication which take into account the constructive processes of the “active audience”. Thus, it is argued that the fields of communication and of education mutually define one another in the understanding of pedagogy, where four types of pedagogy are distinguished: “moralistic”, “pragmatic”, “radical”, and “holistic”. The study takes an ethnomethodological approach and is based on a series of media teacher interviews that are then contextualized within the paralleled concerns of educational and communicational theories.

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INTRODUCTION

This work relates theories and perspectives from the academic field of communication to assumptions underlying the phenomenon of media education in its definition by those teachers who practice and advocate it. In so doing, it aims to accomplish three things. First, it argues that there are indeed philosophical consistencies among various branches of communication scholarship that can be applied to the analysis of an endeavour like that represented by media education. Second, it aims to expose the common assumptions between media education and those large areas of communication studies. For the purposes of this project, 'media education' is defined as the theories and practices propelling a secondary-school-educators' movement, while 'communication studies' is defined as the scholarly pursuit among researchers in the broadly labeled field of "communication". Third, it suggests how the recognition of such commonalities between the two domains might benefit both fields. The argument will proceed thus.

1. There are certain (limited) assumptions that media teachers take for granted.
2. There are certain (limited) attitudes and practices that can follow from these assumptions.
3. These assumptions are also found in academic communication theory.
4. Recognizing these parallels is valuable and interesting because

a) communication theory, as a result of its concurring assumptions, provides useful models for explicating and evaluating media education practices, and

b) media education, as a result of its inextricably practical dimensions, provides useful examples to anchor and link communication theory's abstractions to the concrete world of pedagogical experience. This is particularly appropriate since communication studies reside within an educational (university) environment, since they are undertaken with implicit orientations toward *action*, and since, unlike other fields, much of communication studies focuses specifically on *mediation*, which is to say, on the *manner* in which meaning is conveyed.

The benefit in aligning the two fields, however, will ultimately be shown to reside within such a perspective's ability to probingly address the contradiction of schooling in a democratic society. Underlying the study, then, is an exploration of the paradox at the root of the question: *What makes an educated person?* This is offered as one of those "truly significant questions" that Horace Newcomb (1993) urges academia to pursue. The study therefore examines how an increasingly recognized educational movement, the movement for media education, is raising this question anew and exposing the paradox in unprecedented ways. It additionally explores how the relationship between concepts of 'media'

and concepts of 'education' pertain to this paradox of constrained inquiry, addressing why the exposition of the contradiction leads logically to alternative conceptualizations of pedagogy. Thus, it is argued that while democratic pedagogy promotes skepticism as a rule, an interest in 'media' generally provokes questions of *method* that may otherwise seem marginal.

The 'media' vs. 'mediation'

In other words, 'communication studies', regardless of the approach taken within the field, problematizes *how* things mean and not just *what* they mean. Of course, it could be claimed that this is a characteristic of all of the Arts: literature, philosophy, music, etc. That may be the fundamental reason why the Arts are set apart from the sciences, both 'natural' and 'social', since this reflexive component makes consensus on a scale of measurement not only impossible but undesirable. However, the study of communication represents a unique field of inquiry because it is not really a member of the Arts. Rather, it strives to be a social science with all of the associated credibility of unanimously agreed upon standards, but a social science that nevertheless takes for its subject the concern of the Arts: the emphasis on process as inseparable from product.

The strength of communication studies, says Brenda Dervin (1993) accordingly, is in the way they have "propelled a communicative way of

looking at things”, or in what W. Barnett Pearce (1989) has called a “communication perspective.” Thus, many of today’s students of communication have evolved from their earlier counterparts who saw particular mass technologies as new and potentially threatening instruments in a pre-given world. The original concerns that gave birth to the field have fallen into disrepute. Mass society theories have come to be seen as overly simplistic just as the more empirically founded limited effects theories have been accused of narrow transmissional notions of communication (Baran & Davis 1995). Transmission models of communication view media in terms of uni-directional, external, and mechanistic forces that subjugate individuals, even though the forces are not necessarily recognized as “foreign”. Such a perspective can be seen, for instance, in Marcuse’s statement that “the force which transforms human performance into a series of dependable reactions is an external force: the machine process imposes upon men patterns of mechanical behavior” (Arato & Gebhardt 145).

Since the 1970s, many communication scholars have grown increasingly less interested in “the media” as distinct and imposing entities, and more interested in the interactive practice of *mediation* which creates the world and for which television or computers or even language merely provide investigable instances. Baran and Davis suggest that such moves represent recent drives to merge “communication science” with “cultural analysis” in the interest of

contextualizing empirical research within broader humanistic values, lending significance to the former and credibility to the latter. It is in this light that Schröder's citation of Jensen makes sense: "The central object of analysis for mass communication research thus can be said to lie outside the media" (1994: 339).

History of the active audience

While the proposition may seem odd at first, it emerges logically from theoretical evolutions on the nature of "audience". Indeed, it is the concept of audience that permits an integrative approach to the study of various communication theories in relation to each other and in relation to issues of education. Baran and Davis therefore discuss the assumption of "audience activity" as it pertains across the domains of communication's emerging sub-fields (ie. communication science, cultural analysis and critical cultural studies) despite variances in research methodology (1995: 358). It will be further argued in the following pages that assumptions about audience activity foreground the ontological, epistemological and ethical premises of secondary school media educators, with similar inconsistencies of practice. The emphasis on "audience" as a pivotal concept is undertaken in order to highlight the kinds of coherence that are too often obscured with the result of precluding the richness of understanding that only interdisciplinary perspectives can provide. Contrary to O'Keefe's case for "cohesion rather

than coherence” (1993), it is therefore proposed that cohesion requires coherence. Wherever links are forged, agreement precedes. The paralleling of these audience-related assumptions with approaches to media education, it is suggested, reveals compelling affinities even among disparate positions and powerfully accounts for contradictions as well as disagreements among educators wherever they arise.

Audience theories and studies have a notable history within the field of communication. It is important to introduce briefly some of its aspects here since these ideas of audience help frame the analysis of the media educators in the second section of the thesis. However, they will be addressed in greater detail in chapter 7 where the relevance of communication theories to the educational issues and assumptions will be discussed at length.

The most central aspect is what Baran and Davis (1995) have referred to as the “active audience assumption” which traverses both microscopic and macroscopic communication theories. It is the premise of audience activity that has indeed propelled media researchers to examine phenomena beyond media texts and media organizations. And, as Baran and Davis also note, academic ideas about the essential role of message *receivers* have been around at least since the 1920s with scholars like John Dewey who eloquently argued against the then prominent mass society theories. Dewey rejects the notion of the passive and manipulable masses, insisting instead that educated people make

good use of their symbolic environments. His interests in the relationships between communication and education also offer a valuable precedent for media teachers (see, for instance, Dewey 1926). In this educationally oriented regard, Dewey's work is joined by that of Hoggart, whose book *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) is frequently cited as the first text to legitimize the study of popular culture in school. Hoggart's work similarly credits the audience with purposeful involvement with media, exploring the significance of working class British audiences and their particular readings as they pertain to schooling.

Other early studies that begin to suggest that audiences play a pivotal role in the selection and formulation of meanings include the works of George Herbert Mead, Herta Herzog, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Wilbur Schramm. Although Mead does not pay particular attention to media, his theories have laid many of the foundations for what Herbert Blumer would later call the subdivision of "symbolic interactionism" in communication theory. Mead's book *Mind, Self and Society* (1934) proposes that "attention must be given to the mental processes that mediate learning" (in Baran & Davis 1995: 286) and that "the meanings we give to signs and symbols define us and the realities that we experience" (Baran & Davis 289).

In 1944, Lazarsfeld's study *The People's Choice*, acknowledges the intermediary acts of opinion leaders in a "two-step flow". In the same year, Herzog's article "Motivations and Gratifications of Daily Serial

Listeners” is said to have introduced the tenets of “uses and gratifications” theory whereby the audience’s media consumption is understood as conscious, participatory, and intentional. A decade later, Schramm’s mass communication textbook *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (1954) proposes the concept of the “fraction of selection” which attempts to account for audience choices by positing a ratio of reward to required effort.

From the 1960s onward, interests in audience blossom. Agenda setting theories like that of Bernard Cohen concede that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think” (1963: 13). The idea of the “social construction of reality” emerges, as evidenced by Berger and Luckmann’s 1966 book of the same title (*The Social Construction of Reality*). This idea submits that “our experience of reality is an ongoing, social construction, not something that is only sent, delivered, or otherwise transmitted to a docile public by some authority or elite.” (Baran & Davis 291) William Stephenson’s play theory (1967) and Alfred Shutz’s notion of “typifications” (1967) are equally part of a 1960s tide toward a focus on the actions and expectations of media consumers.

The tide continues to swell into the 1970s. Eco (1972) proposes his theory of “aberrant decoding”, suggesting the oppositional power of audiences, and Volosinov (1973) argues that reading should be conceptualized as a *dialogue* between texts and socially situated people.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) delineate the framework for uses and gratifications theory, listing its basic assumptions which begin with the premise that “[t]he audience is active and its media use is goal-oriented.” (Baran & Davis 222) Variations in audience responses are additionally explored in terms of dependencies, as with Defleur and Ball-Rokeach’s (1975) “dependency theory”, in terms of expectations, as with Goffman’s (1974) “frame analysis”, or in terms of socially acquired competencies, as with Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) “cultural capital”. Ritual views of communication are further offered to counter transmission views that discount the bi-directional processes of meaning. George Gerbner’s cultivation theory therefore assumes that “[w]e live in terms of the stories we tell” (1978: 178), Horace Newcomb (1976) theorizes the layers of meaning acting through shared symbols, and James Carey (1975, 1989) proposes ritualistic ideas about media that would be refined to a notion of “public thought”.

Audience studies are further refined and revised in the 1980s and 90s, just as they are more broadly integrated into macroscopic cultural theories and critical perspectives. Thus, Stuart Hall (1980) pursues notions of oppositional and negotiated meanings with his concepts of “encoding” and “decoding”, and with his theory of “preferred” or “dominant” reading. David Morley (1980, 1986, 1989) extends Hall’s model beyond class determinants with seminal studies that account for a more inclusive range of factors of audience diversity. The ritual view of

communication is elaborated (Newcomb & Hirsch 1983; Carey 1989), contributing to the burgeoning of feminist theories and their assumptions about the everyday construction and reconstruction of reality through people's engagements with language or discourse (van Zoonen 1994).

Textual analysis is combined with audience research (Radway 1984, 1986), and popular culture emphases are married with neo-Marxist perspectives (Grossberg 1983, 1989), producing concepts like "the nomadic subjectivity" (Grossberg). Study after study is conducted on the particularities of specific audiences as "interpretive communities". These include Katz and Liebes' 1984 examination of various ethnic groups' negotiations of *Dallas*, Schiff's analysis of *Dynasty's* gay viewership (1985), Jenkins' study of the "trekkie" folk culture (1986), Hodge and Tripp's investigation of the child audiences of *Prisoner* (1986), and Jacqueline Bobo's look at "Black Women as Cultural Readers" of the film *The Colour Purple* (1995), to name but a few. The assumption underpinning these projects is succinctly expressed by John Fiske who proposes that meanings are socially determined:

This does not mean that a reader's social position mechanistically produces meanings for him or her in a way that would parallel the authoritarian way that texts used to be thought to work. The word "determine" does not refer to such a mechanistic, singular, cause and effect process; rather it means to delimit or set the boundaries. (Fiske 1989: 80-81)

All of the "active audience" researchers introduced above thus participate in a particular theoretical history. They posit actively

engaged audience members who create the world in which they live out of socially available systems of representation, and who respond diversely to the uniqueness of their own constructions. All of these theorists therefore provide an important backdrop for the examination of media educators.

***Ethno-methodology*¹**

Fiske also points out the connection between the social construction of reality, audience theory, and ethnography as a legitimate methodology in communication research. He notes how the work researchers like Morley and Ang, with their "use [of] viewers' verbalizations of their [own] responses", promote an "ethnography of discourse" and "helped to establish ethnography as a valid method of studying television and its viewers." (1989: 63) Morley himself argues for the legitimacy of the interview in rebuttal to Feuer's accusation that analyses of audience responses generate the reflexive problem of having to read people's readings, thereby providing no further insight about the audience or the text. Morley replies,

Certainly, much of the audience work discussed here (including my own) is inevitably subject to the problem of reflexivity that Feuer raises. In my own research I have offered the reader a "reading" of the texts supplied by my respondents - those texts themselves being the respondents' accounts of their own viewing behavior. However, in relation to the problems of the status of knowledge that might be produced as a result of this process of "readings of readings" I would still argue that the interview (not to mention other

¹ Although there are varying degrees of adherence to ethnomethodological strategies, for the purposes of this study, ethno-methodology is taken to represent the use of interviews and a process of inductive research (and documentation) based on fieldwork.

techniques such as participant observation) remains a fundamentally more appropriate way to attempt to understand what audiences do when they watch television than for the analyst to simply stay at home and imagine the possible implications of how other people might watch television, in the manner which Feuer suggests. (1989: 24)

Morley is specifically discussing ethnography as it relates to television studies however the principle may be reasonably extended to all audiences once it is accepted that people actively and consciously interact with their environments. Indeed, as ethnographic methods have gained prominence in communication research they have also emerged in other social science fields, including education. As Ray C. Rist observed in 1981, “[t]he interest in ethnography is growing at an ever-accelerating pace – perhaps in proportion to the decline in adherence to the quantitative paradigm dominant for so long in educational research.” (Dobbert vi) Rist edited a series of books in the early eighties entitled *Ethnographic Perspectives on American Education*, acknowledging that “[w]hat makes this collection of singular importance is that it will constitute perhaps the first critical mass of such studies of American education.” (Dobbert v) It was not however the last, and ethnographic studies in education have continued to flourish. It is therefore in recognition of this cross-disciplinary compatibility of methods and of assumptions about people’s active participation in learning that the ethnographic interview strategy is applied to the present study of media educators.

The rationale for this study and its process of documentation

This study is founded, then, on primary fieldwork that consists of a series of interviews with media teachers whose work is geared toward high school students. The teachers represent examples of yet uncommon pedagogical initiatives; they are a minority, and the sample group's relatively small number is a consequence of this. Finding teachers who implicate media in their teaching beyond a how-to lesson with a word-processor or a movie-as-reward on a Friday afternoon is a challenging research task in itself. However, they are there to be found. Moreover, the Montreal area provides an interesting context for exploring this topic because of the linguistically defined political relations within the provincially run school system. The English sector of schools seems to be the beneficiary of a laissez-faire attitude from the provincial government that may have opened up opportunities for more rapid innovation than is typical of educational bureaucracies. The Coordinator of the English Language Arts curriculum at the Ministry of Education refers to this situation in terms of a "benevolent ignorance" from her French counterparts. Consequently, there are programs being developed in the Montreal region that are quite remarkable and innovative; and what is more intriguing is that they can often be rightfully called grass-roots movements since they tend to arise from teacher and student interest rather than from administrative imposition.

Furthermore, while there are interesting changes occurring at higher levels of education as well, the high schools offer particularly poignant cases because adolescents do not necessarily *choose* to be students. Kids attend high school because they are required to do so, and this antagonistic relationship compels some teachers to discount certain elements of conventional wisdom and be especially sensitive to the pupils' needs and desires. The students, in this case, constitute a uniquely and overtly constrained audience, demanding a certain pedagogic finesse. Thus, the interviews are intended to provide some insight into the motivation for those teachers who take the initiative to explore new venues with their classes. Understanding how they view themselves and how they come to take on new material and/or different teaching styles requires an ethnographic approach.

Along the same methodological lines, it is perhaps appropriate to account for the process of documentation and analysis that will unfold in the next chapters. As compared to traditional thesis writing procedures, the following work proceeds, in some respects, backwards. Section I reflects the standard practice of providing an initial framework in order to facilitate the reader's understanding of the subsequent text. However, the rest of the thesis contains a "summary" that precedes the detailed presentation of data, and a presentation of data that precedes a discussion of the relevant literature as an interpretive context. The rationale for this inversion also resides within ethnographic and active

audience assumptions. The presentational sequence parallels the order in which the researcher *makes sense* of the material and therefore also enables the readers, as active audiences in their own right, to follow along in the meaning-making process. The order is additionally explained in LeCompte and Preissle's discussion of the ethnographic methods for analysis and interpretation of qualitative educational research. Thus, the summary represents the first stage of analysis that evokes the original research question(s) and broadly scans the data to (re)acquaint one's self with the breadth of the material and to map the territory (LeCompte & Preissle 235-236). In this case, the research question asks whether secondary school media educators display a unique perspective – a “communication perspective” – in their attitudes and practices of teaching.

The researcher first establishes broad outlines of the phenomenon studied. [...] The outline begins with a search for regularities – things that happen frequently with groups of people. [...] The next step is to assemble chunks of data, fitting those pieces together so that they are a coherent whole. A helpful organizing device here is a written summary of what has been found so far. [...] Writing such a summary helps the researcher to withdraw from minute details and look for the larger picture that emerges. It facilitates what Guba (1978) calls convergence: figuring out what fits together, either because the investigator believes they should or because the participants say that they do. (LeCompte & Preissle 237)

Following the summary, chapters 3 and 4 arise from one important question that is asked of the data during the initial summarizing process: *What shared assumptions underscore the patterns and common*

themes uncovered during the mapping stage? “Patterns and regularities then are transformed into categories into which subsequent items are sorted.” (LeCompte & Preissle 237) Four categories of assumptions are thus distinguished. These are: (1) reality is constructed by media, (2) mediated reality is apprehended *textually*, (3) prior knowledge determines future learning, and (4) the fostering of critical independence is education’s main social responsibility. The four assumptions are thus introduced in Section II and become the structuring concepts for Section III.

“The next step is to begin the time-consuming and laborious process of pulling apart field notes, matching, comparing, and contrasting, which constitutes the heart of analysis.” (LeCompte & Preissle 237) Chapters 3 and 4 accomplish this analytical task; they do so, furthermore, by exclusively focusing on the interview material and therefore allowing the data to “speak” as much as possible for itself rather than becoming subsumed by the power of previous theory. This enhances the “scientific” quality of the research, emulating the investigator’s path of *discovery* as opposed to a path of fitting data to pre-given ideas, and inviting the reader to embark on a similar discovery. By the end of chapter 4, the reader might feel somewhat adrift and disoriented since the relevant academic literature will not yet be invoked to anchor the floating ideas. There may be more questions at that point than answers, but this is intentional and no cause for alarm. Questions

are good. One should always have well considered questions before one is handed pre-packaged answers – that is, after all, what education as defined in this study is supposedly about. And the academic context will follow promptly in Section III.

Thus, the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters undertake what LeCompte and Preissle call “theorizing”, which involves an examination of discovered conceptual categories through “comparing, contrasting, aggregating, and ordering” (242) and through “establishing linkages and relationships” (246). In chapters 5 and 6, the data is therefore placed within the context of research on media literacy/media education so that the four uncovered categories of assumptions may be more generally evaluated in terms of what they might mean for educational theories and practices. In chapter 7, the categories of assumptions are paralleled with schools of thought within communication studies (including branches of communication science, cultural analysis, and critical cultural studies), thus establishing the affinities that warrant the designation of a “communication perspective” among some media educators.

A final chapter completes the work by passing through the “integration stage”, where it is possible to “move beyond the immediate subject under investigation and specify how the data relate to broader areas of interest.” (LeCompte & Preissle 277) The final justification for this study therefore appears in the Conclusion. The Conclusion addresses the significance in considering the disciplines of

communication and education conjointly. It argues that a persistent disinterest in education from within the field of communication has helped to perpetuate profound and unexamined inconsistencies in schools. The especial irony of this short-sightedness among those who study *how* things mean and “the consequences of our ways of knowing” (Jensen 1993) highlights questions about the extent to which any pedagogical practice might suppress knowledge rather than build on it, or might invalidate and marginalize people’s (pupils’) experiences. It also illuminates the degree to which certain academic processes might unnecessarily constrain or disempower individuals rather than accomplish their intended goal of empowerment.

Such a new perspective on the paradox of schooling is furthermore introduced in the context of contemporary and important changes currently affecting educational institutions. These changes add a level of urgency to struggles toward a greater understanding of the complexities of audiences and of learning in a postmodern world. One may note, for instance, the widespread calls for educational reform particularly within the last decade that have been significantly informed by media education movements and by desires to align curricula with the needs of “the new information era” (CMEC Report, 1997). Canada has been responsive to such reform efforts, with the province of Ontario representing, in 1987, the first North American government to mandate the teaching of “media literacy” in high schools. The country’s media education organizations

have produced, in the 1990s, some of the most widely used and highly acclaimed media teaching resources internationally (including textbooks, video kits, television programs, magazines, web sites, and government-sanctioned guides). Additionally, Canadian teachers continue to initiate and develop media classes, prompted by community demand as well as personal interest. Even the academic realm of communication studies has begun to concede the importance and the legitimacy of media education, with the esteemed *Journal of Communication* devoting the entirety of its first issue for 1998 to a “Media Literacy Symposium.”

Perhaps most importantly, though, the justification for this work may be defined in terms of its emphasis on what it means to *know* in our society, on what the study of communication has to say on this matter, and on what the culture can ultimately *do* with its revelations. Here is where communication and education will prove to be most profoundly connected. Thinking about each raises certain questions, and thinking about each in the light of the other raises some questions that previous forms of inquiry have left silent in the schools. For instance, if learning is fundamentally about discovery, at what point does probing end and presumption begin? And what does that mean for the limits to what can be known, and what can be *taught*? It is questions like these that have the power to re-invigorate the political import of communication studies, permitting the field to assume a valuable contributory role in

contemporary shifts within that eminently important “ideological state apparatus”: the school.

Section I:

A Framework

CHAPTER 1

THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY: PEDAGOGICAL ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH MEDIA EDUCATION

Media education has a certain history, even if it is considerably shorter than the history of more entrenched disciplines and ideas, and with this history has emerged a tradition of justificatory arguments, conflicts and confusion. The most significant thorn in the side of the media education movement has surely been its incoherence and its lack of a systematic project due to clashing assumptions. This has been particularly worrisome since the movement is forced to respond to various objections with convincing sensitivity and purposefulness. Successful persuasion of educational communities toward unanimous goals is by no means guaranteed, and the report of the Council of Europe conference on “The Use of the Mass Media at School to Prepare Youngsters for Life” (1982) includes the results of an (albeit dated) poll in which 35% of respondent teachers still regarded popular media, namely television, “as not contributing very much to education which they felt should remain based on written texts.” (Gambiez 9)

The problem of media educators’ lack of direction or solidarity has therefore been diversely noted. “There would, no doubt, be many who would be willing to put their weight behind the media education movement, were it not for the fact that much of what passes for media studies is unimpressively fragmented and heterogeneous”, concedes

British media education guru Len Masterman (1985: 17). David Considine likewise remarks on the poor level of response to the media among American educators compounded by an absence of a systematic approach where responses do exist (1990: 29). Also, Patricia Aufderheide observes the various answers that are offered to the question of why students need to be media literate.

Some teachers want to give students the tools to control their own expression, or even provide them with a job skill - a perhaps unreasonable expectation for the great majority of students. Some want to give them weapons against mass media's seductions, a noble concept that unfortunately pits the teachers against a pop culture envisioned as the latest Satanic lure from high culture. Some see media literacy as a Trojan horse that leftists can use to sneak their critique of commodity culture and its concomitant ideologies into the public schools - an agenda that is at odds with that of many public school teachers. Teachers may even get caught up in a sentimental solidarity with students, or indulge a voyeuristic fascination with the students' pop culture. (1992)

Aufderheide aligns this problem of disparity with the disarray within popular culture research, although she fails to point out the general lack of dialogue between pop culture researchers and education practitioners (see Quin 1994). This interrelational oversight may discredit any attempts to account for the confusion in terms of researchers' influence. However, the absence of exchange may be just as contributory to the inconsistencies.

Further examples of incoherence can be found, for instance, in the naming of the field. Is it *media literacy*, *media studies*, *media education*, *media across the curriculum*, *cultural studies*, *communication studies*, or,

indeed, something else? And what's the difference between these?

Answers are again multiple and discordant, and they frequently obscure rather than reveal any possible ties between the principles that accompany the terms.

The 1994 report of British Columbia's Canadian Association for Media Education (CAME) states that "there are currently four approaches to teaching about the media: 1. as an independent course of media studies; 2. as a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary concept; 3. As a pure across-the-curriculum approach; 4. as a cross-curricular theme with a base in an existing subject." (8) Masterman, on the other hand, while detailing the standard distinction between "media studies as a specialist discipline", "media education as a coherent element taught within an already established curriculum subject", "media education across the curriculum", and "aspects of media studies as a topic within an integrated (non-subject based) curriculum", insists that the dichotomy between media studies and media education is a false one (1994: 60-64). Both CAME and Masterman, at least, stick to categories determined by the situation of the field within the curriculum, note accordant teaching strategies, and offer rationales as well as critiques.

Ontario's *Media Literacy Resource Guide*, however, enumerates TEN! "specific approaches" which include everything from "semiotics" to "full-credit courses in media literacy" to "values education", from "cross-media studies" to "creative experiences" to "the inquiry model".

Furthermore, the astounding breadth of concerns addressed - from specifically content issues to strategy issues to the location of the material in the curriculum - would not be so bad if the *Guide* made any attempt to differentiate between the approaches, account for the premises upon which the distinctions are made, and suggest some advantages and disadvantages of each approach as it applies to the teaching of “media”. It would seem, though, that such unexamined diffusion as evidenced in Ontario’s *Guide* reflects either the authors’ lack of sensitivity to a need for unifying concepts or else their inability to come up with any.

This persistent incoherence is, indeed, the great irony of the media education movement that touts itself as the champion of conceptual thinking, of a perspective that enables the apprehension of *relationships*. It certainly does not help the cause, anyway, when advocates can’t even be clear about what relationships are governing their own fundamental understandings of education and of the media. The group in Ontario has served to exemplify the state of confusion but the Ontarian situation is hardly unique.

Thus, in order to emphasize the underlying unity of certain key assumptions and to understand how such disparity results in spite of this commonality, it is important to account for the additional assumptions that generate inconsistencies. These are most easily traced in terms of four kinds of approaches taken toward the teaching of media.

The four approaches are delineated in terms of educators' attitudes as opposed to locations of the field within the curriculum, describing particular media classroom strategies and the assumptions that propel them. They represent ideal types so that they do not account for all of the nuances and complexities of teachers' behaviour, however they are quite helpful in situating teacher practices along a continuum of related premises. The approaches are labeled *moralistic*, *pragmatic*, *radical*, and *holistic*; and they provide a useful framework for examining the interview data in terms of the kinds of variations that exist among media educators.

The Moralistic Approach

It is often noted that media education owes its inception to the first movements for film education in the 1920s and 1930s. The prospect of "teaching" the media arose as a result of concern over the moral decay prompted by the rising movie industry and its malevolent seduction, particularly of young minds. The Payne Fund Studies conducted from 1929 to 1932 both concretized these concerns with the weight of statistics and reflected a growing uneasiness in the public in response to the new and increasingly pervasive mass media (see Lowery & DeFleur 1983: 31-54). "Media education was, thus, in its earliest manifestation, education *against* the media" (Masterman 1994: 20), and the term "inoculative approach" is widely used to describe the legacy of those early

efforts. Such a moralistic imperative in reaction to the disturbing involvement of the masses in popular pleasures did not, however, originate in the twentieth century with the advent of technological mass media. It has indeed, as Kubey and Csikszentmihaly remind us, followed Western civilization for over two thousand years. Plato wrote in the *Republic*, "Then shall we simply allow our children to listen to any story anyone happens to make up, and so receive into their minds ideas often the very opposite of those we shall think they ought to have when they are grown up?" (cited in Kubey & Csikszentmihaly 16) And Cicero complained "If we are forced, at every hour, to watch or listen to horrible events, this constant stream of ghastly impressions will deprive even the most delicate among us of all respect for humanity." (cited in Kubey & Csikszentmihaly 16) These early "citizens" were referring to the unsettling excesses of the classical theater but their remarkably contemporary criticisms resonate to this day.

Still, it was not until recent history when institutions of public media and public education were forced to coexist in an ambiguous relationship that concerted efforts and arguments were made to marry the two, bringing the popular into the classroom. Some usefully compare the debate over the educational validity of film, radio and television, for instance, to the nineteenth century struggle for the study of English - a movement that sought to justify the classroom inclusion of popular novels against the classicist bias that kept such "vulgar" authors as

Mark Twain out of the schools. The goal nonetheless remained a moralistic one, seeking to protect students from nefarious influences and to instruct children toward specific discriminatory tastes which were thought to be the foundation of the educated being.

This moralistic branch of the media education movement, still popular today with its appealing rhetorical value, is frequently categorized under the concept of Leavisism. Leavisism is named after F.R. Leavis who, with Denys Thompson, published the highly influential *Culture and Environment* in the 1930s, a practical handbook which served “as a clarion call to educational resistance against the corrupting influence of the media.” (Masterman 1985: 304) Masterman credits Leavis and Thompson for being “instrumental in making the discussion of popular texts in the classroom an acceptable and intellectually respectable activity for many teachers.” (304) He observes, however, a number of flaws with the Leavisite approach, associated in part with the fact that Leavis himself was a literary critic who unapologetically viewed his work as well as literature in general as grounded in an aesthetic of “true judgment”. Indeed, many theorists have since noticed that the aesthetic premises of the moralistic approach problematically place media artifacts in a realm of “art” that is removed from political concerns or issues of context.

The Pragmatic Approach

The pragmatic approach to media education suffers from the same political ineffectuality of the moralistic approach, but for different reasons. Teachers who subscribe to a pragmatic philosophy primarily view the media in terms of their capacity to convey relevance within the curriculum - a perspective quite apart and often contrary to that of the moralists who are more interested in time-honoured tradition than in contemporary usefulness. Naturally, relevance is not an inherently bad thing; indeed, as many famous educators have observed, relevance is the opposite of uselessness and education *must* be relevant “because understanding is useful.” (Whitehead 1917: 6) Nevertheless, the kind of relevance that is proposed here lacks political engagement because it unquestioningly skirts issues of ideology in favour of technological imperatives and the desire to cater to students’ financial and entertainment interests. Relevance is therefore defined in terms of a changing technological environment that requires specific, often technical, skills; vocationally oriented programs epitomize the culmination of the pragmatic approach.

The Radical Approach

The radical approach opposes both the moralistic and the pragmatic approaches in that it takes communication to be an essentially political/ideological phenomenon. Thus, despite the fact that

it is underscored by particular moral and pragmatic positions, the radical approach is nonetheless centrally concerned with the ideological “demystification” of (media) texts and their conditions of existence. Such a perspective is founded in the notion that a deeper awareness of seemingly natural occurrences empowers people to challenge the *status quo* through a more profound understanding of the processes by which consensus is achieved. The goal of the “radical politics of visual literacy” (Dery 59) is ultimately, then, subversion; it represents an educational approach seeking to make the world strange, unfamiliar and open to new possibilities,... to turn the world upside down.

Our culture has room for at least acknowledging that there can be a profundity within the image. Simultaneously, it must acknowledge that there's very little about our educational tradition that empowers people either to make sense of an imagistic world or to use images subversively, to turn the world upside down. This is the agenda for the future. (Ewen, quoted in Dery 62)

Problems do nonetheless arise with the radical approach, originating from the monolithic way with which ideology is dealt by proponents of radicalism. It is especially important to remember the corresponding criticisms because the radical approach, being typically most favoured by academics and intellectuals, often enjoys a misleadingly alluring eloquence of defense. Thus, while moralists may too readily be dismissed as conservative zealots - a title not at all flattering in educational circles - and pragmatists might be seen as having, unwittingly or not, sold their soul to The Man, the radicals are

too easily construed as heroic freedom-fighters. Yet, how truly liberating or empowering is the brand of freedom they are peddling when the politics are as prescriptive as any argument for “good taste”? And how different, really, is their “selling” strategy – the strategy that defines themselves as the underdog heroes of a consciousness war – from the ones they so passionately condemn? Since, the radical approach frequently witnesses a fervent effort among teachers to sway students to accept their own oppositional and *correct* interpretations through dogged insistence.

The Holistic Approach

Giroux observes within educational spheres two branches of radicalism - the content-focussed and the strategy-based - adding that “few radical educators have provided a theoretical perspective that equally acknowledges and integrates both positions.” (Giroux 1981: 63) Such integration is the objective of a holistic approach, and the inclusiveness of the approach is what defines *holism* apart from radicalism, even though the result is frequently referred to as “radical pedagogy” (Giroux, Freire). Comparable concepts have also been named “alternative pedagogy” (Goodson), “progressive pedagogy” (Bowler), “critical pedagogy” (Alvarado), “oppositional pedagogy” (Donald), or have been related to a “creative curriculum” (Stafford). In addressing the radical approach to media education above, the content-focussed

position has been elucidated. In order to understand the type of fusion that is proposed by holism, however, it is important to also examine the strategy-based position since it is equally integral to the holistic approach. It has not been discussed previously because it tends to be absent among most media educators for whom the contentiousness of the subject area prevents them from straying too far from content concerns. "Books about media education have typically been preoccupied with defining the *content* of the subject, often in the form of simplified accounts of academic research. [...] However, in some respects, the broader debate about *pedagogy* - that is, about *theories of teaching and learning* in media education has remained conspicuous by its absence." (Buckingham et al. 200)

Giroux thus explains that the strategy-based radicals look beyond content to the manner in which traditional classroom practices structure relationships of dependence and domination.

According to the strategy-based position, conventional ideology may be significant as a mode of mystification, but the essence of social control in the schools is to be found in the reproduction of reified social relationship, in the confinement and restriction of individual and social experiences. [...] The radical core of this perspective lies in its presupposition that as students experience a qualitative change in their classroom encounters, they will be in a better position to redeem their own subjectivity, their psychic autonomy. (Giroux 1981: 65)

Although Giroux concedes the important contribution of strategy-based radicals to theories of education, raising most crucially the question of

traditional pedagogy's "functional underside", he also levels the standard criticisms against their approach. Most notably, he points out that the social relations of the classroom become divorced from theoretically informed action due to a lack of commitment to any coherent body of knowledge or sustained political stance. (Giroux 1981: 66) Giroux thus insists that the strategy-based position represents no improvement from the content-focus in its still problematic cleavage of content and process; the strategy-based perspective seems, then, to offer no better solution to what Giroux calls the "endemic paradox between freedom and control" (30). He therefore proposes a "radical pedagogy" to more adequately address the paradox. This radical pedagogy is akin to the notion of holism presented here.

The proposition of a holistic approach in this context is therefore different from Masterman's concept of holism, and the distinction should be drawn immediately in order to avoid confusion. Masterman is the only media education theorist to offer the term "holistic approach" although for him this is something separate from the conceptualization of the inter-relating of theory and practice as a new scholastic paradigm which attends to the paradox observed by Giroux. Masterman's holism points specifically to an integrative drive to align media educators with support structures, which is to say, with parent groups, media workers, teacher training programs, and technical resources (1985: 260-268). Meanwhile, his notion of "media across the curriculum" is more reflective

of the holism presently proposed; Masteman offers “media education across the curriculum” (1985: 242) to explain the inter-relational concept within the curriculum itself. However, this distinction may be unnecessarily misleading, turning attention away from the fundamental integration that media education can connote on *all levels simultaneously*, and running the risk of confusing a new integrative paradigm with the move to “tack on” the subject of media to each of the other separate disciplines. *Holism*, in this sense, functions better as a single descriptive concept. The holistic approach, then, is based on the recognition of transverse concepts and of inter-relationships in a universal way.

Nevertheless, the holistic approach has powerful implications especially for the development of the study of media. Holism is the perspective that allows for the mutual definition of communication, pedagogy and politics; media education has suffered in the past from a lack of conceptualization in such interrelated terms. Furthermore, the greatest strength of the holistic approach as it relates to the notion of “media education” also appears to be the greatest strength of communication theory in general. It posits a paradigm that forces those within it to concede that the area of inquiry not only addresses certain phenomena but also, crucially, the methods one uses to “talk” about them. It is necessarily personal. And teaching practices are just as implicated in the concept of “communication” as any film, or television,

or printed text. Practitioners of holism can therefore re-invigorate the value of “objectivity” in teaching and learning as opposed to the “objectivism” that has been the legacy of positivistic public education since its inception.

If objectivity in classroom teaching refers to the attempt to be scrupulously careful about minimizing biases, false beliefs, and discriminating behavior in rationalizing and developing pedagogical thought and practice, then this is a laudable notion that should govern our work. On the other hand, objectivism refers to an orientation that is atemporal and ahistorical in nature. In this orientation ‘fact’ becomes the foundation for all forms of knowledge, and values and intentionality lose their political potency by being abstracted from the notion of meaning. When objectivism replaces objectivity, the result, as Bernstein points out, ‘is not an innocent mistaken epistemological doctrine’. It becomes a potent form of ideology that smothers the tug of conscience and blinds its adherents to the ideological nature of their own frame of reference. Objectivism is the cornerstone of the culture of positivism in public education. [...] As such, it represents not only an assault on critical thinking, it also grounds itself in the politics of ‘what is’. (Giroux 1981: 51)

The holistic approach thus makes explicit, in an unprecedented manner, the extent of mutual definition in the relationships between communication, pedagogy, and politics. Such an approach is dependent on new paradigms that “upset the unilateral relations that linear thought had established between cause and effect, source and receiver, center and periphery.” (Mattelart & Mattelart 191) It accompanies these paradigms by pursuing a kind of coherence that goes beyond the high-minded consistency of the moralistic approach, beyond the common-sense abdication of the pragmatists, beyond the prescriptive political

fervor of the radicals. The coherence of holism is sought not in absolutes but in an openness to multiplicity, ambiguity, conditionality, and uncertainty. “The new paradigms call for transversality.” (Mattelart & Mattelart 191) Yet, though the paradigms may be new, the ideas are not so novel. John Keats, in a letter to his brothers written December 21, 1817, wrote of a thing he called *Negative Capability*: “that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (Keats 539). Perhaps, then, negative capability is the answer to the problem of apparent incoherence that has plagued media education movements.

The education workers who were interviewed do not consistently demonstrate a holistic approach, nor do they fall neatly into any of the four approaches (ie. moralism, pragmatism, radicalism, holism) described. Most teachers do not. This does not however diminish the value of the typology. Despite the dilution, educators generally identify most strongly with a set of objectives particular to one of the approaches, although methodologies can be less easily delineated, particularly with regard to holism. Table 1 recapitulates those objectives.

Table 1: Sets of Objectives Attending Approaches to Media Education

APPROACH	OBJECTIVES
Moralistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -develop <i>discriminating</i> media consumers -nurture "good taste" and an appreciation for "quality (as defined by "high culture")" -protect children against moral corruption
Pragmatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -develop technical proficiency with media tools and language -prepare students for the labour force "realities" of an "information society" -make school more interesting/relevant
Radical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -develop <i>resistant</i> media consumers -question and subvert assumptions about "reality" -demystify texts from ideological workings
Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -structure schooling around the concept of "communication" -forge interdisciplinary and content/process coherence -politicize meaning -encourage self-conscious learning

Limitations to Holistic Approaches

It should be clear that the grouping of the Quebec teachers under a set of four assumptions will attempt to show, in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, the extent to which these media educators approach a holistic perspective and where deviations occur. Some, naturally, are closer to holism than others, and the lack of complete immersion in that approach can be accounted for by a number of factors. The first is that, as Henry Giroux explains, an integrative approach to education emphasizing content/strategy coherence is severely undertheorized. While teachers can appeal to a breadth of resources detailing the legitimacy of

moralistic, pragmatic, or radical pedagogical arguments, there are few such resources supporting the principles of holism as a viable educational project. Interestingly, there is a substantial body of work in communication theory (to be further discussed in Chapter 7) that validate holistic notions but these are immobilized by a general failure to explicitly extend their implications to the educational realm. The work of Piette & Giroux (1997) and Sholle & Denski (1994) constitute two notable exceptions of education being examined, though limitedly, in the ways it is specifically informed by communication theory. This project, in alliance with such works, seeks to rectify this unacceptable negligence. It has been an absence that has witnessed a strange and solitary process of conversion among a number of teachers who have, through their own sensitivities and diligence, figured out for themselves many of the aspects of a holistic approach without the luxury of a unifying concept (Considine 1997).

If criteria can't be borrowed from established disciplines like literature and music (as has been the case with Film Studies) and if there isn't an established body of 'ideas' and 'facts' to be transmitted, the teacher has to start thinking in terms of reorganising the curriculum and reconceptualising his/her whole definition of the term 'knowledge'. (Alvarado, quoted in Cook & Hillier 20)

A second factor that has limited educators' holistic commitment is the increasing insistence on "accountability" in education - accountability being construed in highly conservative terms. Just as communication theory was coming into its own, offering new ideas and

the possibility for new pedagogies, a climate of conservatism in education (Alvarado & Bradshaw 1992; Quin 1994) ensured that teachers depend on more traditional defenses for their work. This is especially true for the area of media education that is often already viewed with skepticism as unnecessary scholastic “fluff”. Thus, moralism and pragmatism seem to constitute the most defensible approaches, while conscientious “rebel” teachers (sometimes covertly) incorporate radicalism into their classes. It should be noted, however, that the interactive methodology that is most consistent with the pragmatic approach tends to get tempered by other forces of traditionalism which will be further discussed as part of the next factor of limitation. Moreover, the need to justify one’s practices to a frequently unsympathetic school board or parent community and the need to accommodate a rigid educational structure still see to it that when media education is attempted, the philosophies underlying all but holistic approaches remain dominant forces in the determination of the program. The mere institutional constraints of schooling are significant in the compromise of media education’s revolutionary potential, as Buckingham, Grahame and Sefton-Green assert (81). They dejectedly suggest that the only answer may be to abandon any search for academic status, thus leaving academia to wither with the weight of its own limitations.

Another factor suggests that teacher training itself tends to inculcate a resistance to the holistic breakdown of hierarchical and

distinct categories. The location of teacher training in the modern university contributes substantially to such a barrier. Ulmer thus notes, as he relays the important implications of Heidegger's notion of "ongoing activity", that "the scientific way of knowing and the institution of the university are interdependent, if not synonymous" (6). Consequently, the academic institutions entrusted with the preparation of future educators hold to a paradigm founded in the Enlightenment (foundationalist) values of individualism and print literacy, the symbiosis of which culminates in a transmission view of communication (Ulmer 9).

Proponents of media education have also pointed out with striking resonance how "[w]ith rare exceptions most academics, including those in colleges of education, have achieved their position because of their skill with print and words." (Considine 1990) Judy Brandeis, the media literacy coordinator at The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, refers to this as the discouraging "conundrum" of training media education teachers from within the necessarily antagonistic confines of the academic system. "I can't think of anything worse than this crop of teachers coming out of McGill, Faculty of Education - where I went - teaching pretty much the same as I was taught to teach," she says. Yet she acknowledges the likelihood of this situation. It is a situation further aggravated by the general institutional rifts between the fields of communication and of education in the academic sphere (Considine 1990; Considine 1997; Sholle & Denski 1994; Page 1996).

Thus, with oppositional momentum developed from initial stages, the “traditional model of education” within which instructors-to-be receive their early orientation to teaching persists as a barrier to innovation. Considine attaches the possibility for pedagogical innovation (too exclusively) to technology and he observes how technology is, in this way, perceived as a threat.

In this traditional model of education, the teacher is the main decision maker, dispensing information largely through chalk and talk, to passive students, lumped together in groups, taught in formally controlled blocks of time and evaluated mainly through repetition. Technology, which promises independent activity, discovery learning, and student-centered classrooms, represents an all-out assault on these traditions. (1997: 252-253)

The important thing to notice here is the threatening quality of the strategies often associated with technology and not the narrow view that technology inevitably implies radical pedagogies. It is also important to acknowledge that such perceived threats will surely meet with resistance and defensiveness among teachers as well as teachers of teachers, and that these objections will require sensitive and systematic responses.

Towards the Creation of a “Postdiscipline”

Masterman therefore teasingly wonders: “*Can* the media be studied and taught in a way which is as systematic, as intellectually rigorous and as conceptually coherent as more established subjects?” (1985: 17); he suggests optimistically that indeed they can, and that media education

does constitute a distinctive discipline. (20) But the question is flawed; it implies that media education should strive to be like other subjects and that its legitimacy depends on the degree to which it can conform to the norms of traditional subject definition. Such assumptions may in fact be the very ideas that discount the role of negative capability, preventing individuals from seeing the coherence of media education in the first place. It is a coherence that might have been there all along, that might have expressed itself in practice if not in words, but that people have simply failed to pin-point through all of the smoke-screen terminology. Perhaps it is not the coherence of “established subjects”. Can there not be another kind?

Media education scholars have variously posed this question, both implicitly and explicitly. Sholle and Denski have, for instance, pondered similar matters of coherence with their proposition that media education provides an example of a “transformed educational practice” or of a “locus for experimentation in the creation of a postdiscipline” (111). They first admit that the field is “entirely muddled and incoherent” yet they go on to describe it in terms of a flexibility that may very well constitute a new notion of coherence.

Media education exists in a dispersed array of institutional arrangements with widely divergent names; it is unclear as to its past and underdefined in terms of its purpose; it is radically interdisciplinary, although it doesn’t know it; it is dimly viewed and low in status; it has no direct connection to elite traditions; it has no coherent method, object of research or theory; it is neither a liberal art nor a social

science or it is both. In positive terms, media education is currently in a potentially flexible state, one in which it can, without coming in mortal conflict with an existing tradition, transform itself through beginning anew. (111)

Maybe this “flexible state” in which media education finds itself is not a particularity of the current situation, something to be momentarily exploited. Maybe it is, more accurately, the one constant of media education or media studies or media literacy or whatever; maybe it is THE unifying concept, the foundation of the field’s coherence.

Indeed, flexibility is at the root of the holistic approach, and it weaves its way through the four sets of assumptions expressed by the interviewees. Thus, in the forthcoming discussion of the interviewees’ accounts of their various attitudes and practices, it will become clear how shared assumptions confront further discrepancies related to moralism, pragmatism, radicalism, and holism. The interplay of these assumptions correspondingly finds itself in the literature on the subject of media education, and this will be noted accordingly in Section III. Furthermore, inconsistencies will be explained in terms of this interplay; and the extent to which different teachers participate in Sholle and Denski’s transformative “postdiscipline” can subsequently be suggested.

In its potential to realize this postdiscipline, the holistic approach is accordingly offered as most valid in a democratic society, dealing most appropriately with the paradox of freedom and control through an articulation of negative capability. It thus incorporates the objectives of

the other approaches without being prescriptive. It also encourages discrimination but without allowing teachers to limitedly define the criteria; it accomplishes all the goals of pragmatism without making them the center of the learning experience; and it does develop skills for resistance as well as ideological awareness without imposing a political view. Furthermore, the holistic approach, contrary to the other approaches, relies on a “communication perspective” that takes communication as more than a subject but rather as a structuring concept.

The “communication perspective”

Those who most closely approximate Sholle and Denski’s “postdiscipline” may be said to express what W. Barnett Pearce has called a “communication perspective”. It is indeed in the formulation of a communication perspective that media education is therefore linked to communication theory more generally. Pearce explains what he means by a “communication perspective” as he elaborates on its antagonistic relationship with “foundationalism”. This unique perspective is said to represent the perceptual framework that has arisen from what Pearce calls the “discovery of communication” in the second half of the twentieth century. Its principles can thus be found in such movements as the Kuhnian attack on objective science, the study of perception as metaphysics, and the “linguistic turn”, the “interpretive turn”,

“structuralism”, “poststructuralism”, and the arguments for the “social construction of reality” within philosophy (Pearce 11-18). These movements all explore the *processes of meaning-making* instead of postulating meaning in absolute terms, demonstrating an alliance with such concepts as Keats’ “negative capability”. They insist, furthermore, on the polysemy of all texts and therefore conceptualize a new, more constructive relationship between people and their world as this multiplicity becomes individually meaningful.

Pearce observes that “[t]he discovery of communication consists more in a new way of thinking about the human condition than in a new awareness of a particular form of human action.” (23) His observation is echoed by the educators in this study who, as the data will reveal, all stress that their fundamental goal is to change the *way people think* – about what they see, and about what it means. Such a drive inevitably finds itself in conflict with “foundationalism”, a term used by Pearce, Rorty (1990) and others to define the common epistemological stance that has governed the modern Western tradition (Pearce 8). Perhaps foundationalist assumptions are nowhere so apparent as they are in the modern school, which still stands as the exemplary modern institution and as the revered gateway to modern prosperity. Foundationalist assumptions are, contrary to those of the communication perspective, premised upon a notion of finite, absolute meaning. As a philosophical position, foundationalism holds that knowledge is *something* that can

therefore be passed on, transcribed, measured, verified, falsified, accumulated, acclaimed. It holds, too, that knowledge can, or rather must, be *disciplined*, referring to the practice of splicing it up into specialized and easily manageable units, to be digested in linear succession. People are consequently judged according to hierarchies of *more or less* knowledge, and in terms of expertise (which denotes an advanced standing within a discipline). Accordingly, people's ability to engage knowledge "objectively" remains implicitly unquestioned, which ultimately proves most problematic for adherents to a communication perspective.

The interviewees thus promote assumptions that contradict some of the basic principles of the educational institutions to which they belong. One of these central principles involves an understanding of teachers as possessors of a privileged body of knowledge. The rejection of such a principle makes educators with a communication perspective somewhat contentious and ironic figures. The above discussion of the limitations to holistic pedagogical approaches shows how practices driven by a communication perspective are even likely to be perceived as threats. Educators adopting such a stance are threatening because they are ironically advocating an approach to education that denies teachers the one great perk accorded their profession: the taken-for-granted position of intellectual superiority; the top rungs on modern society's "knowledge ladder"; the keys to the kingdom. It would appear, then,

that teachers who reject foundationalism in favour of a communication perspective are also shooting themselves in the foot. Individuals like Neil Postman conclude that there is “something perverse” (Postman 1992:10) about schoolteachers being enthusiastic over the breakup of their knowledge monopoly. But Postman and his like-minded compatriots are mistaken. It is only perverse if one considers the ability to educate as dependent on a monopolistic power of force. This is the point of contention disputed by some media teachers.

In fact, it is not perversion that compels these schoolteachers to cede their once glorified status as the sole gatekeepers of knowledge. It is, rather, an alternative concept of learning. Educators who adhere to a communication perspective propose that learning is not about power; it is, rather, about authority, and there is a world of difference. Bruce Lincoln defines the distinction. He explains that authority is consensual and entirely dependent on the regard that “subordinates” have for those in authority; it consequently “permits certain speakers to command not just the attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience” (Lincoln 4). When power is implicated, however, authority dissolves. The exercise of force, for example, represents an instance of power that negates authority; Lincoln thus states that “when authority operates (and is seen to operate) on pain and fear rather than on trust and respect, it ceases to be authority and becomes (an attempt at) coercion.” (6) The enforcement of a knowledge monopoly of teachers is

therefore argued to typify an attempt at coercion precisely because it disrespects students and the extent to which each individual acts as his/her own fulcrum of meaning. No one, it is believed, has exclusive dominion over meaning. The idea is perhaps captured best in the statement by media teacher Janet Sargisson who claims, "I'm just a viewer like everybody else."

This leveling of the plane between teacher and student therefore exemplifies the kind of challenge that a communication perspective brings to such modern institutions as the public education system. However, despite its radicalism, it should not be mistaken for a new concept. An awareness of the difference between power and authority in learning has been around in North America at least since 1855:

The boy I love, the same becomes a man not through derived
power, but in his own right,
Wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear, [...]
He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves
the width of my own,
He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the
teacher.

-Walt Whitman
"Song of Myself"

Section II:

The Interviews

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY: BROAD THEMES EMERGING FROM THE INTERVIEWS

This is a study of communication and of education, each in the context of the other. It proceeds through a comparative examination of teachers and of academic texts because it has been primarily high school teachers who have, in their respective environments, initiated and implemented the kinds of pedagogical changes that so valuably animate the communication texts in question. This chapter will therefore introduce the teachers who were interviewed as the basis of the study. In addition, it will broadly present some of the themes within these teachers' own accounts of what they do and why. A more detailed interpretation will follow in chapters 3 and 4.

However, it must be noted upfront that an exploration of educational issues involves more than educators; it involves, of course, students as well. Thus, while this study remains, for the purposes of concision, teacher-focused and in direct engagement with a group of educators' approaches to schooling, the importance of students in education nevertheless underscores the research. Students' voices are as varied as they are numerous, and their investigation is beyond the scope of the present work. Still, it is the experiences of students that inspire and contextualize this examination of teachers. To suggest otherwise would be naïve, and to refuse to acknowledge such

fundamental relationships would be dishonest. The author is, after all, a student. The significance of this identification becomes clear when one considers the five anecdotes, offered as prologue to each of the five themes that provide a basic introduction to the views of the studied educators.

The anecdotes are brief first-person narratives offered by the author as portals into the large areas of regularity found in the data. The rationale for the anecdotes is threefold. First, the anecdotes provide a direct expression of some of the author's assumptions in an effort to comply with Hall's advice that the "most we can do in order to be scientific is to make our positions, our assumptions, and our values available to other people" (1989: 45). Second, the personalized narratives make for more engaging reading and guard against textual staleness too often seen in academic writing. Third, and most significantly, the notion of the researcher as a "gatherer of anecdotes" (van Manen 1990: 69) is fundamental to phenomenological methodologies which also focus on the active role of individuals in their engagements with their symbolic environments. Thus, Max van Manen observes that a "common rhetorical device in phenomenological writing is the use of anecdote or story" (115). Like ethnographers, phenomenologists study "lived experience" while pursuing "data" collection through such methods as conversational interviewing and close observation (van Manen 53); and like ethnography, phenomenology has influenced researchers in both fields of

education (see, for example, van Manen 1990) and communication (see, for example, Schutz 1967). In response to trends toward the reification of theory, phenomenologists argue that “[i]n our efforts to make sense of our lived experiences with theories and hypothesizing frameworks we are forgetting that it is living human beings who bring schemata and frameworks into being and not the reverse.” (van Manen 45) In this emphasis on the human subject, phenomenology finds itself compatible with other audience-centered methodologies and therefore useful in the context of the present study.

There are twelve educators that constitute the members of the sample group. They include representatives from 4 private high schools, 5 public high schools, and three educational institutions that serve as resources for secondary-level media teachers. These last three, while not presently teaching high school, are all former high school teachers whose experiences as such powerfully inform the work and attitudes with which they are currently engaged. One of them even stresses the association specifically, observing, “I’m a teacher doing government work”. She adds, “which I like to think makes me very subversive”, expressing an awareness of the extent to which such identification marks her uniqueness. A sense of radicalism or uniqueness is expressed by most of those interviewed, and it highlights one of the factors that makes this - albeit small - group so informative. These are educators who see themselves as unconventional, as special, and often, by consequence, as

out on a limb all alone. Thus, while the group is small, it nonetheless provides compelling data, and not only because the members are literally *exceptional*.

The data is additionally compelling because a number of the teachers are unfamiliar with the work of each other. One discovery made during the course of the research is that generally teachers don't talk to one another about pedagogical challenges and innovations; they do so reluctantly within the walls of their own institutions, and almost never beyond those walls. Many of the educators who were spoken to attested to this fact. Some pointed out the situation of simultaneous scheduling and the impossibility of interacting with other teachers when they had their own classes to teach. Some mentioned the culture's condescension toward teachers and the sense of insecurity that subsequently arises, preventing them from confidently addressing one another. Some noted, as well, teachers' general distrust of conversations about pedagogical strategy, nurtured from a legacy of unchecked criticism; everyone thinks they know the *right* way to educate, and no one seems to have a problem with saying as much. Some even referred to a deeply entrenched habit among educators that becomes self-perpetuating: "Teachers are used to working in isolation," one interviewee lamented.

Such isolating tendencies are emphasized because they make innovative similarities among disconnected individuals that much more noteworthy. There may only be a dozen educators who inform this

study, but they are twelve individuals from different schools or organizations, in different areas around the Montreal region, with different mandates attending a range in students' economic level, gender, age, religious affiliations, and academic proficiencies. The fact that these disparate people have all, on their own, come to explore similar pedagogical perspectives that challenge traditional practices is therefore highly significant. Table 2 lists the names of the individuals who were consulted along with their affiliation and the date of the interview.

The data collected from the interviews was first examined for general recurring themes. Five themes were extracted, and they help provide a good introduction to the responses that the interviewees gave to questions about their teaching practices, their motivations and their educational beliefs. These themes represent the areas of emphasis within the teachers' expressed perspectives, and it is interesting to note that, while the five themes underlie all of the data, each educator seems to privilege one above the others. Indeed, the variations among the teachers may be best understood, perhaps, in terms of unequal devotions to the five areas of thematic concern. The five themes place media education in the context of (1) the filling of a scholastic void, (2) student excitement and student boredom, (3) the exposing of the instinctual, (4) the relinquishing of control, and (5) the value of alternative pedagogies to redress inconsistencies.

Table 2. The Interviewees

Educator	Affiliation	Date of Interview
PRIVATE SCHOOLS		
Janet Sargisson	Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's School (ECS)	Feb. 27, 1998
Brenda Wilson	Trafalgar School for Girls	Sept. 11, 1998
Mike Hughes (& Bruce Norton)	Centennial Academy	Sept. 14, 1998
Linda Novek	Bialik High School	Sept. 28, 1998
PUBLIC SCHOOLS		
Lee Rother	Lake of Two Mountains High School	Jan. 22, 1998
Frank Tiseo	Laurier Macdonald High School	Feb. 25, 1998
Michelle Lukes	Royal West Academy	June 10, 1998
Philip Corcos	Westmount High School	Sept. 15, 1998
Stephanie Fortune	Royal Vale High School	Nov. 10, 1998
RESOURCES		
Abigail Anderson Goodman	Ministry of Education of Quebec	Feb. 19, 1998
Judy Brandeis	The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, Inc	July 9, 1998
Winston Emery	McGill University Department of Education	Mar. 23, 1998

THEME 1: Filling a Scholastic Void

When visiting the ACE Program at Lake of Two Mountains High School, I had the opportunity to chat with some of its attendees. The few I met had come from different schools but they shared the same complaint: the teachers they had in the past all treated them like they were stupid. Some said that the teachers clearly didn't care if students learned anything or not. ACE, however, marked a change for these kids.

"They teach us more with respect," they said. "We're students, as if we're somebody."

One girl, Jennifer, a seventeen year-old black student and daughter of a single mother who herself never finished high school, explained to me why she voluntarily left what she called "normal" school to join the program.

"Not all of the other teachers but most of them," she said, "they just made me feel like so, like, outside of everybody else."

"I'm a person who doesn't let people step on my feet," she added later. "I'll say what I think, and that's kind of bad in school."

As Jennifer continued to eloquently recount the differences between her current educational environment and that of her formerly experienced "normal" school (speaking, by the way, in a second language for this francophone student), she happened to describe herself as shy. I interrupted her, amazed at such a seemingly misplaced characterization.

"You're shy?" I said with evident disbelief.

"Yeah, man," she assured me. "I'm extremely shy, but it doesn't show, I don't know why. Here, I feel like... open, like I don't have to think about what I'm going to say for like ten minutes to make sure I say it right so nobody's going to judge me."

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The teachers who were interviewed speak at length about the media class' ability to fill a void they perceive in schools, a void of content as well as of procedure. The story of Jennifer and her peers presents the dichotomy between "normal" education and one that is media-inspired; and the fact that the students associate the hostile environment of previous school experiences with a condition of normalcy highlights the

reasoning behind media teachers' struggle for more inclusive practices. The teachers argue that traditional schooling excludes a central component of their students' present and future lives, namely the media. Additionally, they suggest that this same lack of sensitivity is evidenced in repressive pedagogical approaches, where students are made to think of themselves as incompetent, shy, stupid, etc. because a significant part of their experience is neither valued nor acknowledged. They observe how the incorporation of the "subject" of media opens the way for a typically absent dynamic between teachers and students, whereby student experience is more broadly validated.

In many cases, this comes to be understood as a response to a search for *relevancy* in schools. Abigail Anderson Goodman, coordinator of English Language Arts at the Ministry of Education, postulates about the development of media education in such terms. She states, "I think the search for *relevancy* may have led people to explore." Of course, the search for relevancy implies a sense and a fear of educational obsolescence among teachers. Fortune, a teacher from Royal Vale High School, suggests for instance that the imposition of aesthetic value judgments can contribute to irrelevance. The other educators qualify Anderson Goodman's speculation by stressing the ubiquity of the material studied in a media classroom and the appeal of its familiarity. Several of the interviewees use the following words precisely in response to initial questioning about why they do what they do: "They [the

students] are so bombarded with images.” The teachers also speak of a “need” to give context to the images and messages that students encounter, “so that they can navigate through that,” as the ECS teacher, Janet Sargisson, explains. The word “need” is used by each of the respondents, emphasizing both a sense of duty and a sense of absence.

Ultimately, though, the interviewees claim or imply that the study of media offers an immediacy that is unparalleled in other domains. This, they say, is unique on a number of levels. It is observed, for instance, that the class elicits an honesty from students that is rarely found in school. Unlike the print-based scholastic tradition with its inherent intentionality, an investigation of media enables teachers to confront and engage immediate reactions. Corcos, from Westmount High School, addresses the simultaneity uncharacteristic of print-based education when he notices how the reading tradition allows for distanced reflection and therefore the greater possibility for tailoring responses. “I find that tv gives you an instant response and then you can grab the kid while they’re still thinking, you know, quickly. And what they say usually is honest; it comes directly from the heart.” (Corcos) Perhaps more importantly, though, the usefulness of media lessons is said to be self-evident. This is best expressed by Bialik’s Linda Novek who recognizes that “one of the big questions that kids will ask [...] is *What’s the point?*” Novek admits that sometimes those questions are hard to answer. “But when I talk about *media*,” she adds, “I mean, bang!

tomorrow!... that day! When they walk home and they see the billboards on the buses and so on and so forth, they're suddenly given skills to read these media texts that are everywhere in their lives."

The void that is perceived, therefore, is an absence of everydayness in formal instruction. Rother, the media teacher and ACE (Alternative Career Education) program coordinator at Lake of Two Mountains High School, thus observes how the development of the program has witnessed a certain migration of students from the "mainstream" to his alternative option. According to Rother, students are drawn to the "familiar" element of media education and, of "their own volition [have] decided that the traditional program wasn't working."

The void, then, is seen to threaten the very legitimacy of conventional schooling. These teachers, however, counter such a threat. For them, the everydayness of media justifies its educational value; it is the taken-for-granted familiarity involved that brings a number of new assumptions to schooling. Thus, Anderson Goodman differentiates media teachers from traditional teachers who "always start with the assumption that the child is a blank slate." Philip Corcos elaborates, saying that "teaching the media is probably one of the most unusual things you'll ever do in school." He compares media to drama since he teaches both, and he speaks of the difficulties particular to the media class because it requires teaching by *de-familiarization* or by *re-familiarization* rather than by introduction.

THEME 2: Student Excitement and Student Boredom

A short while ago I met a young woman who was a student at one of Canada's most esteemed universities, and our lines of dialogue moved in rapidly seamless succession from introductory small talk to a discussion of the silencing of radical ideas in the schools.

She said she had learned to keep her mouth shut and I said, "It's depressing, isn't it?"

"No," she replied, dragging the word out in a second of thoughtful hesitation. "It's not that it's depressing. It's just that it's not inspiring."

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The insistence on educational relevance burgeons into a second theme beyond the desire to venture into the school's untrammelled caverns of ubiquity. There arises, in addition, a heightened sensitivity to students' level of excitement toward learning. Anecdotes like the one above therefore represent both the level of dissatisfaction against which the interviewees claim to work and the level of expectation that drives their efforts. The teachers agree that education should be relevant in practical terms but not merely so; it should also be exciting; it should be inspiring. They consequently monitor closely the degree to which students may be "turned off" and they react against such alienating practices. Most significantly, they are unapologetic in their assumption that student alienation is rampant and that teachers have a responsibility to diminish it. As Winston Emery says, "in some cases, kids are having a very difficult time connecting. And teachers maybe ought to ask them: *What do you know already? What do you need to*

know? Emery, of course, trains future media teachers through his professorial position at McGill University's Department of Education.

In addressing the concern with alienation, the teachers speak frequently of media education's ability to combat student boredom and disinterest by offering them "a way in to find their voice", as Sargisson puts it. Janet Sargisson is one of the teachers who specifically emphasizes the cases of students "who fall through the cracks", noting that "it's very much *that* student who will turn on in this course." Lee Rother works exclusively with such cases of marginalization. He describes how his students' "depth and enthusiasm" toward discussions of media led to his realization of the inadequacy of traditional definitions of literacy. Rother also stresses how a media education prerogative has permitted his "at risk" and stereotypically resistant students to "get involved" and "take much more initiative in their own learning".

Excitement, however, is not only stressed as integral for those students who have difficulties in conventional school environments. All of the respondents talk about the justificatory aspect of student appeal on a broad scale. Thus, Lukes, from Royal West Academy, explains how "media" "is interesting to any kid", Fortune states that her students "love talking about media", and Corcos notices how "there's already something charismatic about it, you know, for them". Novek compares her media class to her more traditional English class, observing: "There's a real,... there's like an effervescence in the media class that I don't have in the

English class". She adds that her media students "have so much more to bring to the table, much more than any other kind of class. So it's very exciting for them and for me." Brandeis, the media education coordinator at The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, points out how student boredom is countered by the media class' ability to make lessons "meaningful to the students rather than meaningful to the teacher". Anderson Goodman similarly talks about media education's effectiveness in responding to the need for rendering texts "available" to students. Laurier Macdonald High School's Frank Tiseo and Trafalgar's Brenda Wilson both mention the importance of the thrill students get in literally *seeing* what they have learned through the visual nature of media projects. And Hughes, the media teacher from Centennial Academy, states, "If they're not excited about learning, then I'm not doing my job."

THEME 3: Exposing the Instinctual

Those of us who have always done well in school are familiar with the frustration attending the receipt of undeserved praise and reward. There has been little that has annoyed me as much as an effortless "A", because it comes with no pride. But of all the prideless "A"s I've amassed, the one I remember most was the one affixed to my structuralist analysis of Henry James' story "The Story In It."

I had written a ten-page essay by copying the method I found in Roland Barthes' book *S/Z*. And when it was done, I could not speak any more confidently about what the James story meant. Nor did I think I understood anything about this "structuralism" business which I promptly decided was useless. So when the paper came back with an "A" adorned with comments about the impressive intelligence and high quality of the work, topped off by an actual "thank you" from the instructor for taking the assignment so seriously, I naturally concluded that my teacher was an idiot.

It was not until several years later when I was newly led to the study of structuralism that I realized I wasn't supposed to be able to explain what the story meant. That is the lesson of structuralist analysis. And as it turns out, I did learn it then. Only, I know it now.

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The anecdote describes a situation that the educators interviewed know all too well. While they do not distinguish “learning” from “knowing” in precisely those terms, they nonetheless express an awareness of the difference. Indeed, it is this difference that forms the nexus of their commitment to “media” as legitimate pedagogy. For, as the anecdote indicates, people learn many things every day and all of the time; new relationships or connections are constantly being perceived, assimilated, and reacted against, without the person necessarily being conscious of this process. Learning that takes place without such intentionality appears natural and instinctual. Thus, the interviewees all claim, though in various ways, that it is their goal to denaturalize this ongoing learning process and to therefore enable their students to *know* more profoundly about their learning rather than to *learn* more about *something*. The subject of “media” provides fruitful lessons because it allows the teachers to take already learned material and to challenge the kinds of mystification that can be involved. As Fortune puts it, “That’s the skill I give them: the tools to analyze the stuff. They have the stuff.”

The members of the sample group focus on different levels of demystification and consequently gravitate toward different practices,

but there is still a constant theme of a desire to expose instinctual learning processes. Tiseo and Hughes are the most production-oriented, explaining that production requires students to confront the notion of “rules” in media. In making their own media artifacts, students come to know the complexity of choices involved in the presentation of seemingly natural images and messages; and, as Tiseo insists, “before you can break the rules, you have to know the rules.” In fact, it is for this reason that the interviewees advocate the incorporation of as much production in the classroom as resources and teacher knowledge will allow. Emery makes the argument when he declares that the primary objective of media teachers is to get students to understand that a media text “isn’t a naturally occurring phenomenon. [...] The best way to get kids to understand how it works is to have them be media producers themselves. By having them do that kind of thing, they pick up on things that they see and [they] look at them more critically.”

Denaturalization is addressed, however, beyond discussions of the role of production. The educators emphasize that exposing the instinctual in the media is so important specifically because the media are so commonplace. Lukes, for instance, relates her mission to teach her students “not to take certain things for granted” by asking them to consider absences in the media; “we teach them to question *everything*,” she says. Sargisson and Brandeis both stress that a deeper kind of understanding must be elicited from the students precisely “because the

media are so much a part of their culture" (Brandeis), because "[t]hey're watching this stuff all the time" (Sargisson). "It's like the UV," offers Brenda Wilson with a useful analogy that suggests how powerful influences can be whether they are consciously experienced or not. "It's there, you don't know it's there, [but] you have to build up an awareness of what is coming around you." Rother accordingly posits a difference between *watching* and *reading* that parallels the distinction between learning and knowing. Finally, Corcos talks about the unconscious "routine" that surrounds students' mediated (television) experiences; "and I'm trying to break that routine," he says. "[A]s soon as I see the students begin to react instinctively, I'll turn off the tv. And they begin to wonder [...]"

THEME 4: Relinquishing Control

There are few moments of my high school days that I remember as clearly as that time when our Moral Education teacher yelled at us to shut up. She yelled with a fury that I have rarely since experienced.

"Shut up!" she screamed, "I don't want to hear your opinion!"

I remember because I screamed back... in my head. My teeth clenched and my toes curled and my eyes watered. And in my silent anger, I spent the rest of the class writing a hateful poem about the evil of teachers who somewhere got the screwed up idea that their job was to frighten children into docility.

I thought that leaving high school would mark the end of that kind of anger. So when I encountered it again, years later at university, it caught me by surprise. Only this time I was older, stronger, more mature. This time, I (mistakenly) believed I should confront it directly. I approached the teacher calmly and good-naturedly after class, and I suggested that repeatedly threatening an auditorium full of undergraduates may not elicit the results he was hoping for. I dared to suggest that students didn't appreciate being continually shouted at, with commands to "shut up".

I was eventually told that I was making a big deal out of nothing. And at the end of the term, I was privately summoned and scolded at length for my “bad attitude” that was, according to the professor, glaringly obvious from day one.

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The example of students being told to shut up is extreme although undoubtedly not uncommon. The point of the anecdote, however, is not to paint teachers as the sometimes erratic people that they are, but to raise the issue of the conflict of control that permeates all interactions within the accepted hierarchy of teacher-student relations. The difficulty, of course, is that the hierarchy – particularly in contemporary school contexts – is never simply accepted; it exists in a perpetual state of struggle. Ultimately, though, traditional approaches to education make implicit as well as explicit arguments for the positioning of the educator as the center of pedagogical control. Such arguments are seen, for instance, in the teacher’s authority over lesson plans and choice of topic, in grading strategies, in classroom discussion patterns, in seating arrangements, in constraints over movement and expression, in access to blackboards and other media, etc. The interviewees dispute these arguments, or at least they propose a more modest perspective. Thus, a fourth theme appears in their responses: the relinquishing of teacher control.

In the context of relinquishing control, the “shut up” anecdote seems most pertinent to Anderson Goodman’s assertion about her and her colleagues’ views. She says that their approach is a direct reaction

against past views that dealt, for instance, with the study of English according to the attitude: “just shut up and listen and I’ll tell you what Shakespeare meant.” (Anderson Goodman) Novek, Brandeis, and Fortune also compare the teaching of English with the teaching of media. Novek observes, “you’re much more secure as the traditional English teacher. This is... you’re kind of out there with them.” Brandeis says that the basic change an English teacher has to make in order to teach media involves the “giving up [of] a bit of power.” Similarly, Fortune acknowledges that, in the English class, “I still have more of a hold on things.”

Several of the educators notice how this alternative positioning can lead teachers to question whether they are indeed *teaching*. “[V]ery often I feel in my media class, I think ‘Oh my God, I’m not teaching them anything [...]’ ” admits Novek. Lukes elaborates on the teacher’s compromised sense of expertise, noting that students will invariably know things about media that the teacher will not know. She recognizes that some teachers are uncomfortable under such circumstances; “[i]f they’re not the expert then they think they’ve lost their role as teacher... that they’re not *teaching*.” (Lukes) Lee Rother makes the point that he is not perceived by his students as the “key master” of knowledge, and that his perspective represents a rethinking of teacher-student relations; he accordingly advocates a pedagogy “where the kids are active and the teachers are hopefully stepping back a little.” Hughes and Sargisson

further discuss the potential discomforts over this kind of shift and over its attending loss of control. Sargisson explains that “you have to be comfortable with that because otherwise you might feel ‘Am I doing my job?’” Hughes defines the resistance he has experienced from his colleagues as “a question of control.”

Even Corcos and Wilson, who are the most traditional teachers among those interviewed, display concurrent attitudes. “I give them [the students] more freedom,” says Corcos. “If anything, they spend their life being told what to do, so they’re thrilled at the idea that I’m actually going to give them *carte blanche*.” (Corcos) Wilson states: “I don’t talk so much [...] There’s an awful lot of pressure all around to teach your students [so] that they really *do* feel empowered”. Finally, Emery summarizes how the approach adopted by him and by other media teachers recasts the issue of control: “It tends to change, I think, the notion of the teacher as being always the center of both dissemination of knowledge and the center for control of what actually goes on in the classroom.” (Emery)

THEME 5: Alternative Practice (Redressing Inconsistencies)

It has always seemed to me that institutional education, more often than not, encourages the narrowing of one’s knowledge rather than the expansion of it. So, upon hearing that courses outside my department could be credited toward my master’s degree in communication, I gleefully turned to what seemed the most appropriate and amenable complement: the department of Interdisciplinary Studies. I made a special request as an ‘outsider’ to attend a basic-leveled seminar. I was denied. The reason given: Interdisciplinary Studies was not my major.

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Some things about schooling just seem ridiculous; they don't make any sense, and it doesn't matter whether one is talking about university or high school or elementary school or whatever. If the inconsistencies like the one alluded to in the above anecdote were not so grave they would be laughable. Indeed, to many of today's cynical students, they are laughable anyway. However, some people are not laughing; some are challenging old assumptions with alternatives in the hopes of redressing such insidious paradoxes. The interviewees for this study are among them. A final theme in the interview data, then, deals with the value of alternative approaches toward the elimination of inconsistencies that undercut the credibility of educational institutions. It is a theme that moves beyond the concern with student dissatisfaction as seen in theme #2 to an examination of systemic anomalies and limitations.

The interviewees perceive a number of anomalies and they subsequently mount a number of individual challenges, some more radical than others. They observe, for instance, how visual modes of engagement are marginalized by conventional schooling with its persisting emphasis on literary print modes. "And schools, traditionally, have been very print oriented, even though what the kids are doing at home, etc. are very multimedia." (Rother) Teachers like Tiseo, Lukes, Rother, Hughes, Sargisson, and Corcos all further highlight the atypical group-work strategies that are facilitated by their attentiveness to visual

engagement. Corcos, for example, stresses the cooperative aspects of his visually-oriented media classes, contrasting them with the classes in which “you’ve got your pencils and your papers and your books” and in which you generally “work alone”. He implies that the textbook tradition posits a solitary learner. Such privileging, according to Anderson Goodman, is translated into a belief that “kids today learn differently” since the discrepancy between the visual youth culture and the print-based academic culture seems increasingly obvious. However, she wonders “whether there was not a tremendous visual need in most people throughout the entire century that was ignored by the education system.” (Anderson Goodman) She thus advocates a perspective that corrects this absence, makes schooling more appropriately *social* rather than isolationist, and recognizes visual modes as equally central to learning.

If visual learning has been ignored, it has been so because of a further inconsistency within education that defines the popular as necessarily mindless. The interviewees take issue with such a prejudice, suggesting that education is rooted in the popular whether one acknowledges it or not. Brandeis raises the point when she comments on the way “teachers are sort of conditioned to hate the media [...]” She adds, “But I’m not sure that they really understand it any better than their students understand the traditional texts that the teachers feel have more cultural value.” The equating of popular texts with “classics”

as comparably valid terrain for study is done by a number of the teachers. The contention is that sophisticated understanding can accompany even the most mundane of texts, as Stephanie Fortune insists. “[I]t’s an extremely complex course,” she says, “and it requires incredible skills of analysis.” This appears to be a novel educational assumption, as Novek, Corcos and Emery further attest. They describe the difficulties faced by media teachers in terms of simply gaining validation from peers and students for their “flaky”, “fluff”, “blow-off” courses. “You have to spend the first week of theory explaining why this is a course,” Corcos says. Nevertheless, all (somewhat radically) agree that substantial thinking is involved in people’s struggles to make sense of media.

Various reconceptualizations follow from this perspective and promote a positive stance toward alternative pedagogies. First, assumptions about students’ skills and knowledges must be re-evaluated. Most of the interviewees emphasize the extent to which whole areas of student knowledge get dismissed and consequently neutralized in traditional educational settings. Novek thus prides herself on her open-mindedness that has permitted the controversial décor of her classroom; it is replete with evocative and sometimes overtly sexual magazine ads taken from popular journals. She explains, “I say to myself, it’s all mainstream magazines – *Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *People* – the magazines that their children look at.” Wilson additionally argues that

“there is no such thing as a child who fails”, and Rother relays stories of students with supposedly poor literacy skills who are “remarkably adept at articulating how language – spoken and visual – was used in the context of commercial programming.” Rother also describes a need to “start thinking about multi-level learning” rather than multi-level classrooms.

Moreover, it is suggested that the complexity of all texts invites an inter- or cross-disciplinary treatment, in contrast to the education system’s traditional reliance on disciplinary fracturing. Thus, Anderson Goodman recommends that teachers “shake the system up” by adhering to the view that “nobody is locked in a discipline.” Sargisson is accordingly sensitive to the connections between her media classes, other classes, and the students’ home environment. Hughes likewise discusses his efforts to integrate the media projects across the curriculum; he mentions, too, the team-teaching phenomenon that was (revolutionarily) unique in their school’s media program, marrying science/technical teachers with English/theoretical teachers. And Fortune expresses some awe over those media programs that bring together teachers of varied specialties; she calls them “true media programs.”

In expressing their perspectives through the five themes, the teachers also allude to a sense of their own uniqueness. Only Abigail Anderson Goodman actually uses the term “subversive” when describing

herself, yet the others transmit a similar belief in their unconventionality. This is done, in part, by an emphasis on the fact that they are alone in their work and in their approaches. “I’m squirreled away in my own little room doing my own little thing here,” says Novek. Hughes poignantly asks if anyone else is doing what he is doing, revealing his sense of solitude in his approach to teaching. Fortune, when asked about her situation in her school, replies, “I’m all alone.” Corcos also explains the element of pressure involved in this kind of isolation: “See, I don’t dare push the envelope too far with these kids because my fear is, the fact that I’m the only media teacher in the school, you’ve got to be very careful.”

Discussions of pressures to conform demonstrate a further degree of non-conformity. Lukes, Sargisson, Novek, and Hughes talk about the questioning they sometimes face from other teachers in their respective schools who find aspects of the media courses to be unusual. Emery, Brandeis, Fortune, Hughes and Wilson mention the initial confusion and resistance experienced by some of their students who are not used to unconventional classroom practices. “Students find [it] a little confusing,” relates Emery, “because they’re not sure exactly what’s required of them.” Fortune and Hughes each observe of their students: “they’re not used to it”; both teachers are referring to their refusal to simply give their students answers. In addition, Rother and Tiseo specifically point out the novelty of the programs they have initiated,

each being the only one of its kind in English Quebec high schools. Several of the teachers also make reference to a special personality quality that characterizes them apart from other teachers.

[Y]ou can't turn the class over to a seasoned teacher the way you can an English class. That's interesting. I am so enmeshed in the media, it's Mrs. Novek's M-E-D-I-A. And my personality, I also have... I don't know what it is, it's um... I don't know what the word is... Being 'youthful'? Or being on the cutting edge? Or being very open-minded, open to things?... (Novek)

It is, indeed, not surprising that the educators feel themselves to be radical in some way. For, the themes uncovered permit a preliminary proposition about the nature of the perspectives thus defined. It seems that they can be subsumed by Pearce's concept of a "communication perspective." The next two chapters will therefore examine more closely the kinds of assumptions that underlie the teachers' responses and that tend toward a communication perspective.

CHAPTER 3

TEACHERS SPEAK: MEDIA EDUCATORS' ASSUMPTIONS Part 1

It is clear from the thematic framework outlined in chapter 1 that certain contentious assumptions are being upheld by the educators who were interviewed. Moreover, it is evident that these assumptions are placing the teachers on the margins of common educational practice. But what are the controversial assumptions, exactly? The following chapter will attempt to answer this question by closely examining the statements of the interviewees. The data will therefore be interpreted through such scrutiny and grouped into four categories that will represent four broad areas of assumption: ontological, epistemological (dealing with the “known”), epistemological (dealing with the “knower”), and ethical. Thus, it is proposed that the interviewees reveal a primary commitment to four basic ideas: (1) that reality is *constructed* by media, (2) that mediated reality is best apprehended by textual metaphor, (3) that what one *already* knows determines what one *can* know, and (4) that the fostering of intellectual independence is education's main social responsibility. This chapter will deal with the first two assumptions and the following chapter will address the last two. A close reading of what the teachers have said will elaborate on what these ideas mean and on how they are derived from the data.

Reality is Constructed by Media

The first category of assumptions may be called ontological since it addresses the teachers' views of reality – specifically, the nature of teenage reality. Interestingly, some teachers resist extending their ontological views of young people's existence to themselves, displaying an aspect of their attitudes that is reminiscent of more traditional teacher-student hierarchies. However, all agree, if not generally, that at least their students' realities are *constructed*, and that no meaning within such a reality is unambiguous or uniform because of this. Furthermore, the majority of the interviewees *do not* distinguish between the constructedness of adolescent and of adult realities; in fact, they stress the common experience of reality construction for all individuals. This is evident in the many ways that the teachers describe themselves as being in the same problematic position as the students, facing the same ambiguities and choices that the construction of reality precipitates. Such identification between teachers and students is found in the educators' frequent use of first person pronouns in statements like the following. "I'm just a viewer like everybody else" (Sargisson). "If we're not aware of it, we're part of it" (Fortune). "It just hooks all of us into it" (Novek). "And [to be a neutral observer], that's almost impossible to do, and I don't claim to do it myself" (Corcos).

As the ontological cornerstone of the media teachers' views, the notion of the construction of reality has nonetheless proved to be a

slippery concept. Christopher Dornan, for instance, points to a commonly observed conflict of assumptions when he criticizes the media literacy movement through an indictment of Ontario's *Media Literacy Resource Guide*. He highlights the discrepancy between claims that "media construct reality" and that "audiences negotiate meaning" (*Resource Guide*, 8), wondering: "if meaning is 'negotiated' anew with each and every audience member, how can the media impose 'built in' and 'pre-constructed' universal values"? (Dornan 1994: A7) Dornan thus charges the guide and the movement with inconsistency, oversimplification, and a resultant paternalism. He subsequently concludes that the guide (and, by implication, the movement) is based on a rationale of "kneejerk denunciation" which "advances a political agenda under the banner of education." Such criticisms warrant a response before a detailed analysis of the teachers' references to "construction" can occur.

Dornan is of course right to call attention to the difficulties surrounding stances – in Ontario or anywhere - toward the construction of reality, since it is clear that not all media educators have a consistent perspective. However, his conclusion is premature; and it is Dornan's error that provides insight into the meaningfulness of the interviewees' assumptions about the constructed nature of reality. For, while media educators may sometimes be confused about who exactly is doing the constructing, wavering in their emphases from media artifacts (and

producers) to media consumers, they nonetheless reject the notion of truthful representation. Media, they propose, can only offer representations of reality; and representations are human constructions at the level of production as well as of consumption (if these are indeed considered as separate phenomena since some argue that they are not). Representations are therefore necessarily incomplete. This is the important point. This is why teachers like those interviewed accept “media” as a legitimate field of study; because if mediated experiences invariably conveyed unequivocal and transcendental truths, there would be nothing to talk about. So, it is surely a fair comment to note the existence of a political agenda within media education movements, but it is also a trivial comment; movements are generally political. It is, moreover, undoubtedly justified to critique instances of contradiction surrounding the acknowledgment of *constructedness*, but such instances should not be used to obscure the significance of non-transcendental assumptions nor to cheaply discredit others for one’s own benefit. This last motive seems uncomfortably apparent in Dornan’s smug suggestion that high school media teachers don’t know what they are talking about when it comes to media. It is a suggestion that one might sadly expect from a professor of journalism whose job still depends on the foundationalist privileges of a knowledge monopoly.

Naturally, the sophistication with which the interviewees approach the topic of media varies. However, all have made a conceptual leap into

this ontology of construction, this anti-transcendentalism. The significance of such a leap must not be underestimated. Evidence of these ontological assumptions can be found in the teachers' statements about their work and about themselves.

Abigail Anderson Goodman

It is appropriate to begin an examination of the educators' notions of the construction of reality with Abigail Anderson Goodman since she not only articulates her own assumptions about constructedness, but she also represents the driving force behind Quebec's sole government-published document which announces these assumptions. Anderson Goodman therefore explains that media create meanings; they are not neutral carriers of content. She argues that, ideally, the study of media should be "everybody's responsibility, so that we don't have any more of this use of a video and it's just a video, and all we're taking is the content." She claims that schooling should include for all students "a follow-up class that has something to do with the construction and appreciation of text."

While this reference to construction seems vague, it is nevertheless informed by further assertions laid out in *The Media Files* (1995), the teacher's guide produced under Anderson Goodman's direction and at her request. Here, the assumptions about the construction of reality are clear. *The Media Files* observes not only that "different media are constructed landscapes" but also that people construct meaning through

them (3). Furthermore, the meanings are said to be both social and personal, presenting people's individual realities as highly contingent; "[m]uch of our personal histories are constructed in the languages of the media" in addition to "values, social conventions and norms, opinions and attitudes, as well as new knowledge." (*The Media Files* 2-3)

Additionally, *The Media Files* recognizes that through the "different media, students are presented with the artifacts of their cultural environment, with pieces of evidence about their world which they come to construct into whole and fluid concepts of society today, yesterday and tomorrow." (2)

Anderson Goodman aligns herself with the views expressed in *The Media Files* and she refers to the document when addressing her and her colleagues' criticisms of other media literacy initiatives, namely that of Ontario. Like Dorman, she protests the paternalistic vision of the *Media Literacy Resource Guide* (1989), saying "We took issue with the Ontario Media Literacy document." Anderson Goodman's objection to the Ontarian approach reveals a further element of her commitment to the notion of the construction of reality since she describes the problem in terms of "passivity". In her assessment, the approach advocated by Ontario teachers, while paying lip service to the idea of constructedness, still promotes a protectionist stance that positions students as passive rather than as active contributors to a constructive process. "Whereas they acknowledge media texts and this kind of thing, they were very into

'We're going to protect you from what this could do to you, and we're going to explain how it works', which ironically is pretty much the way English Literature used to be taught: 'Just shut up and listen and I'll tell you what Shakespeare meant'." (Anderson Goodman)

In contrast, she observes that the authors of *The Media Files* "could not see how being a passive recipient of media had anything to do with literacy. In other words, you have to *make* the text ..." The association of media *production* with the idea of *construction* underscores several of the other teachers' views as well. It is believed, for instance, that production as a pedagogical strategy is particularly apt in the teaching of media precisely because it highlights the constructive process as the central dynamic in the apprehension of "reality".

Frank Tiseo

Tiseo, as one of the authors of *The Media Files* and as the veteran of the group (having been one of the first teachers in Quebec to initiate, in 1970, a successful media program at the high school level), accordingly endorses a production-oriented media pedagogy. He thus exposes his perspective toward media and the construction of reality. Indeed, he calls his approach "constructivist" and contrasts it with the Ontario approach, which he labels "deconstructionist". The implication is that a "deconstructionist" approach works with something that is already there whereas a constructivist approach always creates the material with which it is concerned. There are no pre-givens.

Tiseo explains that such creation is fundamental to students' ability to "get it". Like other interviewees, he uses the phrase "get it" to express an awareness of the unnatural character of mediated messages; students "get it" when they recognize the artificiality and intentionality of media. This kind of awareness, says Tiseo, is most effectively achieved when students are required to make media artifacts themselves, since the manipulations and the choices involved are suddenly rendered palpable and *real*. Constructivism is therefore as practical as it is ontologically consistent. "We believe in learning by doing," Tiseo asserts, noting that theory is still inevitably addressed within his "project-based" curriculum. For example, he remarks that issues of ethics emerge out of assignments dealing with photographic manipulation, and considerations of politics and of moral standards impinge upon the students' creations of "appropriate" advocacy advertisements.

Lee Rother

Rother is also a contributor to *The Media Files* and his perspective toward the construction of reality concurs with that of his peers. He too stresses the importance of active student engagement, insisting that learning always occurs actively; this is noteworthy because it emphasizes the idea that understanding is *produced* rather than possessed. Such a perspective is bolstered by Rother's insistence on allowing his students to formulate their own educational questions. He relates this question-

asking pedagogy to an emphasis on constructive or *interpretive* processes as opposed to transmission. He claims,

I may set up the parameters of the project [...] But the question is most often theirs. And that's... I'm not sure if you're familiar but there's two kinds of teaching. There's what's called "transmission teaching" and [there's] "interpretive teaching". Transmission teaching is basically where the teacher says: "Here's the stuff, I'm going to transmit it to you." Whereas the interpretive teacher says: "Here's the ideas, and let's see how you interpret it and what ideas you come up with. That's basically what we're looking at.

In Rother's ontology, reality is not comprised of possessions and of disposessions, nor of discrete units. Moreover, interactions with reality are invariably seen as creative processes as opposed to quantifiable events. He thus notes how his media classes have engendered a different response than is typical of more "traditional" schooling. He observes that his students are "much more active [and...] they are more inclined to complete things, [...] or to get involved in what we're doing than in a traditional sense of sitting at their desk".

He furthermore chastises his "earlier notions" of students' abilities, admitting that his past perspective inadequately assumed that "you either 'possessed' literacy or not." Rother acknowledges a shift in his thinking toward a more fluid concept of reality and of people's dealings with reality. He turns to the notion of construction, recognizing that the ultimate value of a media-based pedagogy is its focus on constructedness. Rother observes, for example, that "media literacy is

about fostering an inquiry about ways in which media and technology construct today's culture." Here, construction suggests the contingencies of the culture since culture is presented as media-dependent. However, Rother goes on to situate the constructive process within each student when he adds that media literacy "invites young people to reflect, question and challenge" (Rother 1998:10). Hence, construction also points to the centrality of the individual in formulating and interpreting plausible realities. This is why Rother advocates an educational reform that focuses more on the constructive process of meaning than on the delivery of ideas, or as he puts it, "focus[es] [more] on the learning than on the teaching."

Judy Brandeis

Brandeis is another member of *The Media Files* team, and she picks up on the personalized aspect of construction. She states that teaching about media revolves around

the whole idea of the importance of the audience and what the audience brings to the text. Whether it's the printed word or a TV screen or a computer screen or a billboard or a magazine or a newspaper article... it's still a text that the audience [member] brings his or her own experiences to.

This relativistic view of audience activity is complemented by Brandeis' equally anti-transcendental approach to media artifacts. She expresses, first, a conviction that standards of judgment are conditional; she notes, for instance, that "some [media texts] have more value than others depending on what the standards are for measuring good and bad texts."

The role that media specifically play in the determination of these malleable standards of evaluation is proposed when Brandeis states that “no text is neutral”. The statement is revealing because she proclaims the impossibility of neutrality in media due to the fact that “the language has value – it’s value-laden.” However, in asking *what value?*, one realizes that her proclamation accounts for media’s construction of reality as Brandeis sees it. For, it becomes clear that she perceives people’s judgments and consequent senses of reality to arise from the creative conjunction of individual experiences and value-potentials in language (ie. media).

Winston Emery

It is remarked by Winston Emery, another *Media Files* author, that the ontological assumptions upheld by media education advocates like himself (and like the other interviewees) are part of a wider conceptual shift that has taken place in education since, he says, the 1970s. Emery thus places the notion of the construction of reality within the context of a divergence from objectivist/behaviourist assumptions – or what he calls a “behavioural-psychology-oriented” perspective. He summarizes the new trend in thinking by pointing to its assumption that “people seek out from the environment what they think is important or significant, and they interpret reality, they *construct*.” Again, it is assumed that objectivity is confounded by people’s personalization of reality; and media are presented as the beacons of such a process. Like Tiseo, Emery refers

to this creative view in terms of a “constructivist approach”, although he acknowledges its potentially problematic implication of a “minimal effects” model of media influence. He therefore amends his statement to suggest that influences *can be* strong and particular realities *can be* compelling if individuals’ experiences highlight certain consistencies in mediated messages. Like Brandeis, then, Emery sees reality as the product of experience combined in a transactional process with media. Such a view, he notes, is a deviation from an earlier behaviourist perspective, “where all you have to do is rig the environment and organize the objectives”. It is, furthermore, a deviation “particular to media education”, recognizing “that in fact people have to construct meaning, [and that] what you have to do as a teacher is let students be pretty active in terms of showing you what they construct.”

Janet Sargisson

The dual aspect of construction is stressed by Janet Sargisson. Sargisson’s position toward the construction of reality leads her to focus on the artificial character of media as well as on students’ creative drives to construct meaning. She therefore declares her objective to be twofold. In reference to the media and their messages, she states that she wants her students “to be able to understand how these things are constructed, and to understand that they’re just constructed realities, so that they can navigate through that.” She also adds: “I want them to be able to make artifacts themselves.” This latter goal is justified by her conclusion

that a theoretically-based, deconstructionist course would be ineffective because “the only way the kids understand is to do it themselves. That’s when it hits them in their faces, that the media are *constructed* realities.” Sargisson’s contention that the constructedness of realities is most evident in the act of *making* further supports the interactive rather than the transcendental view of reality. Here, fabrication is emphasized on several levels that apparently define each other and function simultaneously. It is suggested that media artifacts are manufactured through a process of selection, and that meanings are constructed through a process of selection, neither of which is *natural*. The unnaturalness, it is argued, is only evident when both constructive operations can occur together and inform each other. Indeed, one may question whether they are in fact distinct operations.

Michelle Lukes

Lukes does make a distinction between the two areas of construction, labeling it a difference between “production” and “analysis”. However, she also concurs with Sargisson and with others in her insistence that “there needs to be a balance”, noting that each aspect is equally important and mutually dependent on the other. These are, of course, practical points, but they also contain a philosophy of a contingent reality since these strategies are submitted as tools to get students to realize that “every message has a purpose” and “every person has an agenda.” Thus, production and analysis constructively merge

when, for instance, students are asked to think about the things they have created. This is when it becomes clear, according to Lukes, that the constructive process of production educates “through osmosis”; in other words, the students learn inadvertently. As soon as they are led to consider their own work once a little distance is placed on the creative experience, “that’s when I find there are jumps in the learning curve,” Lukes additionally explains that her mission is to teach students to look beyond surfaces; “we teach them to question *everything*,” she says. The resounding assumption here is that everything is questionable.

Mike Hughes

Hughes’ assumptions about reality and about the manner in which people come to apprehend reality are somewhat more difficult to detect than in the case of the other interviewees. His emphasis on production tends to push direct considerations of ontological issues to the periphery, so unlike his colleagues, he makes no specific mention of “construction”. Still, his descriptions of his pedagogical approach seem to offer the best clue to his perspective toward reality. And it is a relative, constructed reality. For instance, Hughes rejects the notion that there is a given body of knowledge out there, constituting the real world and deliverable in classrooms. Or rather, if there is such a thing, it is impossible to determine and consequently irrelevant to schooling. This is obvious in Hughes’ attitude against standing in front of a class and simply telling students what to do, or what to think. “I don’t like to tell them

anything,” he says. “I let them tell me what they need to know.”

Underlying such an approach is the assumption that knowledge is comprised of indefinite elements and that, as a result, realities depend on the people who perceive them. Furthermore, Hughes’ willingness to concede that students’ competencies are very much intertwined with media familiarities points to his awareness of the role media play in framing the contingencies of reality.

Stephanie Fortune

Where Hughes is concerned primarily with production, Fortune is preoccupied with analysis. This more theoretical leaning permits her to formulate clear articulations of the assumption of constructedness. Thus, when asked what important lesson she has learned in teaching media, Fortune replies, “Everything we see is constructed. And if we’re not aware of it, we’re part of it. That’s the thing I’m trying to impart to them [my students]. It’s a life skill.” In fact, she stresses this idea of “life skill education” as she echoes Pearce with an assertion that media education addresses “a way of thinking” rather than a set of actions. This “way of thinking”, according to Fortune, involves “getting it”. The phrase resurfaces to again denote an awareness of the artificiality of all mediated messages. Thus, Fortune discusses the naivete people demonstrate toward the “more real” media, like documentaries; “they’re constructs too,” she observes. “But people don’t get that.” Fortune also reiterates the sense of evaluative relativism that appears in the

comments of Brandeis. Fortune's recognition of the contingencies of standards is particularly intriguing because it leads her to contemplate her own role as a *medium* in the construction of her students' realities. She claims: "I have to be careful that I don't impose any value judgments. To put down 90210 as being 'bad' is irrelevant. It's important not to put down anything that way, because *I'm* constructing it for them."

Philip Corcos

Philip Corcos is likewise sensitive to difficulties surrounding evaluation. He says, "I don't allow the kids to say the words 'good' and 'bad'." In fact, Corcos explains that he asks students "do you find it interesting?" as opposed to "do you find it good?" The difference between these two questions is very telling, since "good" implies an objective standard whereas "interesting" represents an inherently subjective assessment. In controlling the classroom vocabulary, Corcos therefore denies recourse to an objective reality; he forces discussions to occur on a plane of relativism and concurrently reveals his own assumptions about the constructed nature of students' realities. This assumption of constructedness is extended to media artifacts as Corcos describes his goal to teach students to "build a wall around [themselves] and realize that there is something artificial about [media]". Convinced that everything is an illusory manipulation, he declares that the gravest danger for young people lies in "believing what they see". His promotion

of doubt is reminiscent of Lukes' urge to question everything. Corcos takes a hard-line negative view of the effects of the construction of reality, but his dismay notwithstanding, he still clearly assumes that reality is malleable, fickle, and at the mercy of media.

Brenda Wilson

Wilson makes just a couple of remarks that suggest her stance toward the construction of reality and toward media's place in that process. First, despite her protectionist perspective, she also claims that one of her goals is "to make people appreciate themselves, celebrate themselves." She notes that a major consideration in her high school classes deals with questions of why various people may feel inadequate, and she expresses the view that media can set standards against which individuals measure themselves. For instance, Wilson talks about perceptions of body image and stereotypes, and about the implications of under-representation in media. Without using the term "construction", Wilson therefore reveals the assumption that media contribute to reality rather than neutrally reflect it. She notices, moreover, how engagement with media is itself a reality-building experience. This seems evident in her discussion of one student's "virtual expulsion" from the school, where she says that such a revoking of computer/media privileges is "worse than being expelled" because it ostensibly exiles the student from the world of her peers and ensures that "the kid can't work."

Linda Novek

Linda Novek addresses the construction of reality in her considerations of the ways in which media manipulate students' beliefs and attitudes. Here, manipulation is conceived, not so much as a conspiratorial exercise of force, but rather as an interchange in which one party surrenders its power of scrutiny. Novek recognizes that media have the capacity to manipulate and therefore to *dictate* reality if the process of influence is not examined. She thus stresses the importance of naming and understanding one's own reactions, so that realities may be negotiated instead of imposed. Of course, the idea of a transcendent reality is completely rejected or relegated to irrelevance. What does matter, however, is an emphasis on the *ways* of manipulation. She states, "I want them [my students] to understand the ways in which they're being manipulated, so they can be more informed. It gives them a distance, so they will be less manipulated, or if they're being manipulated, they say 'Okay, I know Calvin Klein is manipulating me but I still want to wear his jeans'."

Novek tries to get her students to focus on *how* they think what they think, and not simply on *what* they think. This, again, highlights the assumption of the fluidity of reality because the process supercedes the conclusions. She explains, for instance, how media strategies such as "joltage" (ie. rapid editing), violence and gender typing offer particular and restricted impressions of what reality is. Her recounting of a grade 9

lesson in “joltage” is quite telling in this regard, and it demonstrates how Novek relates the artificiality of mediated messages to the construction of one kind of “reality”. In this case, the reality defines “boredom” in a very specific way.

They [the students] were all brought up on Sesame Street so we’re watching it now and I say: “Look how fast, look how fast it is.” I said, “Do you think I, as a teacher, could ever compete?” [...] I said, “How could a teacher possibly compete?” I said, “So here you kids [get] 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10, and A-B-C-D-E-F, and they’re dancing and they’re singing...” and I’m getting them to count the jolts. I said, “And then you get into school, and is it boring!” I said, “You kids, you can’t even sit still for 45 minutes.” [...] I said, “What’s the most exciting thing that can happen in a classroom? A kid falls backward on a chair or you have a fire drill.” And they start to see it. And I say, “You kids, you have trouble sitting still for 45 minutes... you’ve got to go to the bathroom and you want a drink of water and you have to do this and you have to do that and you go crazy.” I said, “But that’s why.” And then I get them to compare Sesame Street to a Canadian children’s show, even Sesame Park, to get them to understand that when they talk about Canadian television as boring, when they say “boring”, they mean less joltage.

Mediated Reality is Best Apprehended by Textual Metaphor

This group of assumptions is more epistemological than ontological, defining what constitutes an object in a relationship of knowing. According to this view, what is known is a “text”. The textual aspect of these assumptions implicates linguistic models in the exploration of knowledge, and indeed most of the interviewees have strong ties with the “language arts” tradition. Not all of the teachers use the word “text” but all refer to their units of study in similar ways,

justifying the examination of any media product with literary analogies or with direct comparisons to traditional print. Most of them do, additionally, use the term “text” specifically, as they propose an expanded view of what it means to be “literate”. Thus, literacy is presented as the ability to convey with intent and to interpret meaning through any text, alphabetic or otherwise. Furthermore, all texts are said to be complex and inherently interdisciplinary. This breadth of factors through which texts exist also ensures that sophisticated thinking is involved in their assimilation. Media educators attempt to honour that sophistication; this is why pop-cultural artifacts are treated with the utmost in seriousness by the media teachers.

When discussing media education, it becomes problematic to distinguish media *objects* from *subjects* precisely because the movement tends to urge people to view these as inseparable and as mutually dependent. This group of assumptions about the “text” and the following assumptions (in Chapter 4) about the “reader” are therefore already misleading. However, one cannot escape the limitations that words place on documentation. So, neither can it be denied that texts and readers are each given their due in the interview data. Consequently, this section will attempt to uncover those assumptions dealing with the linguistic approach to knowledge, which includes considerations of textuality, interdisciplinarity, and literacy. The next chapter will begin with a look at those assumptions tied to a social approach to knowledge,

which includes considerations of people's knowledge repertoires and their evolutions through meaning. It should be noted, though, that the final epistemology of the educators is a hybrid of the two perspectives – a social-linguistic philosophy of knowledge.

Abigail Anderson Goodman

It is imperative to point out right away that Anderson Goodman talks about “texts” when she talks about the “subject matter” of a media class. She is, of course, not alone in this regard. Furthermore, she uses terms like “reading” and “writing” in her discussions of people's engagements with media, and she refers to “literary and media texts” conjointly. The textual assumption that is clearly laid out, then, is also associated with language when Anderson Goodman announces that “most of us [media educators] interestingly buy heavily into language and text across the curriculum.” A number of notions are therefore introduced.

First, there is the cross-curricular emphasis. Anderson Goodman raises the issue of “cross-curricular learning” on several occasions. She observes, for instance, the Ministry of Education's promotion of “les competences transversales” (translated as “cross-curricular learning”) while agreeing that “media has to go across the curriculum.” This, she says, is because media involve a fundamental consideration of every medium of communication and “that [...] has a role to play in probably every discipline.” Indeed, the importance of interdisciplinary relevance is

also underlined in *The Media Files* with the conclusion that the “ability to transfer our knowledge about language into different forms of discourse, and into a range of changing situations, is a key indicator of literate social behaviour.” (7) Thus, cross-curricular (or interdisciplinary) movements are advocated on the basis that language traverses all disciplines and belongs exclusively to none. Anderson Goodman accordingly proposes a scholastic restructuring that would witness the dissolution of disciplines. “I’m not thinking of a traditional school anymore; I’m now thinking of a school where we’re not even teaching disciplines anymore, which is deeply necessary.” In fact, she argues against what she perceives to be the misguided attempts of “a lot of people in education [who] are desperately trying to keep [many areas] as separate disciplines when in fact there is no separate discipline of anything anymore.” Such ideas, she acknowledges, have nonetheless proven to be somewhat problematic. She therefore stresses the difficulties that have attended notions of cross-curricular learning, claiming that the concept “has caused more anxiety, more stress, more debate of the non-productive variety than anything else we have.”

The trouble lies with another notion that is introduced in Anderson Goodman’s assertions about “buying into” language and text. The focus on *language* appears to cause some confusion. For, on the one hand, it is recognized that “the linguistic side of the [media] discipline should and does of course go across the curriculum, because the entire curriculum

is negotiated linguistically.” On the other hand, Anderson Goodman attempts to divorce the study of media from its “linguistic side” in order to affirm the integrity of the discipline. In one awkward moment, she proclaim that “the integrity of the discipline probably rests on literacy and media texts but not on the linguistic side.” But what are texts *without* their linguistic side? Moreover, her previous insistent calls for the dissolution of disciplines favour a language-based perspective, and therefore contradict this exclusion of linguistic concerns, suggesting a lapse in reason. It seems more logical to conclude that Anderson Goodman still assumes that language is the linch-pin of media study; language is what defines “texts” and it consequently defines what can be known. Her inconsistency is nevertheless understandable since she even notices herself how contradictory messages are proffered simultaneously within educational spheres. She remarks, for instance, on the paradoxical situation that is created by the ministry’s upper administration with bureaucrats saying through their legislation that “it’s okay to have high school [evaluation] by discipline while at the same they’re telling teachers that we’re doing language and learning across the curriculum.” The conflicts represent a concrete example of the problems generated by disjunctions between theory and practice.

Frank Tiseo

To media educators, the concept of language is of course extended beyond its reference to words, and “literacy” is therefore expanded to

include skills beyond alphabetic familiarity. This is seen, for instance, in concerns like those of Tiseo who focuses on “visual literacy”. Tiseo’s course profiles also detail their interest in the “reading” of images. His own references to texts are complemented by those within *The Media Files*, which is co-written by Tiseo. There, one finds a working definition of text. It can be comprised of word-based artifacts but it is not limited to print. Anything made up of “signs” which are “objects, icons, or symbols that communicate, comprising a signifier and a signified” is a text. (*The Media Files* 5) The authors of *The Media Files* discuss the limitations of traditional approaches to language, expressing a need to expand the view to include a more vast array of “cultural artifacts along with traditional forms”. They accordingly state, “we have had to reconceptualize our notions of literacy.” (5)

Though Tiseo’s use of textual vocabulary is limited, what little there is remains noteworthy specifically because Tiseo observes how different approaches to media education have alternately derived from conceptions of “language” or conceptions of “the arts” (*les arts*). He notes how the media education movements in the English schools have been inspired by issues of language whereas French schools have incorporated media into their vision of the fine arts. The discrepancy is particularly relevant because Tiseo’s program has evolved in an English school but under a French system, within the French school board of Jerome-LeRoy (until this year). Thus, his attention to “visual literacy” is quite

significant, for, French systems do not even have a conceptual equivalent of “literacy” that can address *writings* outside of direct connections with the alphabet; the French word for literacy is *alphabetisation*.

Lee Rother

Rother is similarly fixated on literacy and on the need to rethink its boundaries in order to deal with mediated messages of all kinds. He talks about his students who have been marked, through standardized testing, as deficient in literacy skills and he says, “I was suddenly aware that I had some serious questions about my taken-for-granted assumptions about the often-labeled low level of literacy characteristic of my students.” He comes to this awareness by recognizing that students who have trouble with print may nonetheless be remarkably adept at understanding other forms of “text”. Moreover, this understanding is not incidental; it is an integral key to the things students know and can know. He demonstrates the assumption that meanings are necessarily tied to *language*, and that learning to be “literate” implicates more than a proficiency with words; a literate person comprehends how meanings are expressed. Rother furthermore overtly expresses the parallel he draws between traditional print texts and media texts, using an analogy of reading and writing: “the way we do it is we read and write both print and non-print stuff”. He therefore refers to media education as addressing the “new literacies” and as operating as “the back door into literacy”.

This suggestion of an alternate yet linguistically analogous route compels Rother to note how a language-based epistemology has the potential to revolutionize education. The central factor here appears to be the emphasis on process that textuality implies. Rother therefore stresses how his commitment to the advancement and implementation of media literacy has led him to view pedagogy as inseparable from curriculum, practice as inseparable from content. "Media literacy," he says, "is also about getting teachers to rethink what we teach, how we teach and to whom we teach."

Rother acknowledges, as well, how media literacy defies traditional boundaries, rendering old divisions between disciplines, between school and work, or between school and leisure obsolete. He says he is "consciously optimistic" about media education's future role in the development of "cross-curricular" approaches to teaching within the schools. Also, he is particularly pleased when he confronts his students' complaints that they "can't sit and veg in front of the TV anymore"; it seems that the students realize that their analytical skills become inescapable even outside of the school walls. Moreover, Rother's ACE Program combines study with employment in a complementary relationship that contravenes conventional insular practices.

Judy Brandeis

Brandeis reveals her own textual assumptions when she justifies her efforts to promote media study in high schools. She explains that

media have “become part of the definition of literacy”, which accounts for her initiative to include a substantial media component at The Centre for Literacy of Quebec. Also, she talks extensively about media as “text”, aligning texts from a “TV screen or a computer screen or a billboard or a magazine or a newspaper article” with the more traditional texts of the “printed word”. She stresses that the educational imperative is to ensure that people *think* about all of these texts; it is, according to Brandeis, language-based critical thinking skills that unite popular media with conventional writings under the banner of literacy. “I think it’s important,” asserts Brandeis, “that they [the students] should know how to develop skills for critical thinking about media texts in the same way that they’ve been taught to develop creative thinking skills about traditional texts.” Literacy involves, then, the recognition that “reading” is not limited to letters on a page; literate people are trained to perceive textual relationships in all manner of text.

Winston Emery

The connections between media education and English Language Arts are explicitly drawn by Winston Emery. He observes, for instance, that the controversial philosophical perspectives held by him as a media teacher are shared by “a number of colleagues who think along the same lines, and [who]’ve coalesced around the English Language Arts.” The commonalities here are said to revolve around “a similar notion about theories of language arts and about instruction”, which tend to focus on

“‘cultural studies’ as an informing field to teacher education.” Thus, Emery describes one course he teaches to prospective English Language Arts teachers which includes an introduction to notions of media literacy. The course “introduce[s] students to generalized notions of ‘reading’ and ‘writing’,” he says. “And media is a part of that. So they look at ‘media literacy’ with those kinds of basic understanding.”

In addition, Emery makes a comment about students’ aptitudes towards media that speaks to Rother’s assertions regarding the re-evaluation of assumptions about young people’s knowledges and skills. It may be thought that Rother’s redefinition of “literacy” is simply a watering down of the concept to include abilities that adolescents inevitably acquire without instruction. However, Emery notes that students’ familiarity with media is an encouraging first step rather than an end result; he posits this assumption in terms of “potential literacy”. Hence, he states that “in spite of what people say, I think they’re probably more media savvy and potentially literate than kids were when I went to school. I think that’s encouraging.”

Janet Sargisson

Sargisson also associates media education with language arts, comparing the criteria with which student work is measured. “Some criteria are very much borrowed from the language arts classroom,” she notes. “It’s good writing, basically. They’re writing a text, only using a different medium.” Again, the textual assumption is articulated.

Sargisson furthermore discusses the way this text-based material tends to confound traditional school boundaries, thus highlighting the interdisciplinary, trans-situational aspect of media. She observes, for instance, how the media course material finds its way into the home; “I think they [the students] talk about it at home a lot, maybe more than other subjects.” The material finds its way into other classes as well, since Sargisson finds “that the kids start to use their media awareness in other subjects”. Finally, she recognizes how other innovations in her school compare with the challenges offered by media, observing that the material of the media class uniquely breaks down the confinements of the classroom itself: “it’s usually *inside* the classroom,” she says. But, “*This* is flowing out into the street.”

Michelle Lukes

Lukes relates a similar experience of dissolving boundaries when she discusses the way her students can sometimes be found “in the halls or outside”. She also points out how this kind of abandonment of conventional structures can upset traditionalist teachers. Moreover, she notes the way her classes can appear chaotic because of the redefinition of appropriate scholastic constraints. But she stresses that they are *not* chaotic; they only appear that way through the lens of traditional standards. In addition, Lukes indicates a textual perspective when she explains that “words and images” are explored on an equal plane as comparably meaningful; she thus claims, for instance, that “we look at

words and images that get used, and the way certain people are allowed to speak...”

Mike Hughes

As with his ontological assumptions, Hughes’ epistemological assumptions are more discreetly couched in his focus on production. Still, there are some indications of his philosophy of the “known”, and they seem to concur with the other textual assumptions even if the word “text” does not come into play. For instance, like Anderson Goodman, Hughes sees media as a unifying element of the curriculum. One of his goals, in fact, is the integration of media across his school’s curriculum. This involves, according to Hughes, a contentious challenge to isolationist tendencies within education; he notes, for example, how there has been substantial resistance to his efforts. He perseveres, however, with the conviction that media (like language?) are relevant to every subject area. Furthermore, he insists that media products have traditional (textual?) characteristics that would justify their value to the traditional disciplines. He claims, for instance, that a history teacher might appreciate the “more academic” aspects of a particular project done by his class; these “academic” qualities are suspiciously textual since Hughes lists them as having to do with writing, researching, and documentation.

Stephanie Fortune

Fortune's assumptions are easier to detect. She does say specifically that her concern is the study of "text", and she considers text in terms of its relationship to the more traditional concept. She therefore notes that one of the biggest differences between a media class and an English class is the type of text that becomes the subject of study. "[I have to] be careful that it doesn't become an English course," she says. "For one thing, it's not a literary text [that we're dealing with]". It is, nonetheless, a text. Also, her insistence on "thinking" and on the idea that media education addresses a "way of thinking" rather than a way of acting evokes linguistic concerns despite the fact that she does not directly talk about language. Language, of course, is what frames ways of thinking. Indeed, an emphasis on "frameworks" and on "concepts" as structuring agents also appears in Fortune's comments, and it further underlines her linguistic approach.

Philip Corcos

Without mentioning "texts" specifically, Corcos nonetheless proceeds to describe media analysis in the terms of traditional textual analysis. He asks his students questions like "What is it about?" He gets them to consider how their conclusions are drawn by examining issues like plot, character, symbolism and theme, as well as technique. Corcos discusses, for instance, a lesson about the movie *ET* from which students determine that the film is "about children's dreams and it's

about wanting to have a father and it's about families who are having problems. And ET represents the father that the boy never had." Only technique is treated as unique to each medium, so that factors like camera angles, lighting and sound can come into play. Otherwise, he treats media as extended examples of conventional texts, despite the fact that he characterizes electronic media and print as "different". It is, furthermore, worth mentioning that Corcos also recognizes the boundary-crossing aspect of media. However, he is less celebratory of this trait than are the other interviewees. "They keep transposing what we're doing here into their basement at home," he laments.

Brenda Wilson

Wilson exposes her textual leanings when she, like Hughes, emphasizes certain "academic" components of the study of media. She therefore talks about the importance of copyright, referencing and documentation as they pertain to media lessons; when students study media, argues Wilson, they must learn to deal with these textual issues. In addition, Wilson describes the forms of expression encouraged in a media class as resembling those expected from a "writing course".

Linda Novek

In much the same way that some of the above teachers talk about "literacy", Novek talks about "skills of analysis". They are indeed quite similar, although Novek's formulation excludes the "writing" component; it is primarily interested in "reading". Thus, Novek explains that she

uses her media classes and her English classes to complement each other, since both, she argues, teach “the same skills, the skills of analysis; [only] the *text* is different.” Her textual assumptions and expanded conceptions of language are resoundingly clear in her response to inquiries about the ease with which English and media can be balanced.

In my media class, I explain to them that I’m teaching them the skills of analysis, and I say the same thing in my film class, except the text we’re using, it’s not a book. We’re using a film, that’s the narrative. So, in my English class, I say to the kids ‘We talk about plot, character, setting, theme; it holds true for film’. It holds true, so you’re going to look at those elements, plus we’ve got cinematography and soundtrack and more that is particular to the language of film. It’s a different kind of *text* we’re looking at, but the same skills – analytical skills – are coming into play. That’s where the English teacher and the media teacher are not very different.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHERS SPEAK: MEDIA EDUCATORS' ASSUMPTIONS Part 2

Beyond articulations of the constructedness of reality and of the textuality of meaning, the interview data reveals two more assumptions. The first addresses the interviewees' conceptualizations of people as knowing subjects. This assumption, postulating that prior knowledge determines future learning, expresses an evolutionary epistemology that proposes that an individual's knowledge develops incrementally. The second uncovered assumption addresses the social and ethical aspects of (media) education. This final area of philosophical agreement reveals a valorizing of critical independence, invoking issues of ideology, power and freedom while education's political import is considered.

What One Already Knows Determines What One Can Know

As stated earlier, this set of assumptions accompanies the epistemological assumptions about the object as text. The teachers therefore offer a complementary epistemology of the subject, the *knower*. Here, the philosophy implicates social and cognitive factors, subsequently enhancing the previously outlined linguistic approach with a richer conception of what such an approach actually entails. Thus, the interviewees' attention to the manner in which texts come to be meaningful to students reveals these teachers' sensitivity to the social

and psychological ramifications of language in all of its forms. The teachers therefore insist that it is fundamental to their teaching that their students' prior knowledge and experience be recognized and used. Prior knowledge, they claim, is the primary determinant of learning. Put simply, this perspective amounts to the argument that a teacher has to "speak" a language that the student understands. Such an approach is central because a person's evolution through knowing is believed to proceed necessarily from where it already was, and the most transformative knowing is argued to engage the already known most expansively. These media educators consequently view themselves as perennial students of their pupils' culture, forever trying to learn the language so that their lessons can indeed be meaningful.

In their efforts to thus align languages and meanings, the teachers also place an emphasis on the importance of the students' chances to express the extent of what they know. The interviewees observe that traditional assumptions about education do not seem to engender effective learning because they are far more concerned with the teachers' opportunities to express their own knowledge in their own language. However, the re-balancing of opportunities for expression is not enough to ensure learning. A number of the teachers further note that it is only in the *conscious* use of one's knowledge repertoire that more complex meaning production and more advanced levels of literacy can be achieved. Reflexivity thus enters the equation, as the interviewees

perceive their jobs to entail the raising of individuals' self-awareness. Media education, they suggest, is about making sure people *know* what they already know; it gets students to contemplate all of their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours as textually learned knowledge.

Abigail Anderson Goodman

Anderson Goodman is concerned with the way conventional approaches to education perpetuate a cycle of mythologies about students' competencies. She notes, for instance, a worry among contemporary teachers who claim that "the kids they're teaching now are less proficient readers and writers than the ones they taught fifteen years ago." She says, "To some extent, I think that's popularizing a myth that has its own cycle." As a corrective, she reformulates the observation of student deficiency to account for a *different*, but not inferior, learning process. "Even teachers who are quite inarticulate will tell you: these kids today learn differently. I think they're right about that. I'm not sure, though, whether there was not a tremendous visual need in most people throughout the century that was ignored by the education system."

Anderson Goodman therefore suggests that traditional measures of students' skills only examine a highly limited range of factors and consequently elicit misleading interpretations. As an example, she points to the inadequate consideration of audio and visual competence. She notes not only that students have a whole raft of capabilities that are

excluded from the scope of scholastic evaluation, but also that those knowledges are typically denied any representation at all within formal educational settings. “I think the kind of knowledges they have are astounding but they’re never called up in school,” she declares. This absence is perceived as a tragic flaw. Thus, Anderson Goodman states that the best teachers – what she calls “the top 10%” – struggle against this tendency to repress the articulation of student knowledge. She observes, quite significantly, that the struggle is performed in the name of “availability”; when the best teachers attempt to study a text, “they’re going to render that text *available*,” says Anderson Goodman. This means that the value of acknowledging and embracing non-“academic” student knowledge is believed to lie in that knowledge’s ability to help make course material optimally meaningful to *the students*. Such incorporation allows teachers to be more responsive to the particularities of their specific students, and it translates classroom proceedings into a language that the students understand. This, assumes Anderson Goodman, is essential for effective education.

Interestingly, she also notices how the dismissive attitude commonly directed toward students is often directed at teachers from the larger society. “We have a terrifically hard time acknowledging the knowledge of teachers,” she observes. The observation offers a fascinating insight into the connection between the recognition of people’s skills and society’s knowledge hierarchies. High school

teachers, after all, are not much further up that foundationalist scale than their pupils. It is not surprising, however, that Anderson Goodman extends her epistemological assumptions to teachers as well when she discusses her opinion of the best way to improve teaching practices in general. "The best way to deal with professional teachers is to honour and value teacher knowledge," she insists with marked consistency.

Frank Tiseo

Tiseo also remarks on the various ways that assumed intellectual hierarchies stifle learning. He points, with Anderson Goodman, to the tendency of educational commentators to disregard the knowledge of teachers, citing a divergence between educational theorists and practitioners. Tiseo claims that the theorists, or "academics" as he calls them, enjoy the benefits of status yet rarely present any ideas that are "useful" for teachers; he says, furthermore, that there is an "intellectually elitist" attitude against practicality which impinges on teacher practices as well as student activities. He therefore notes that the media program at his school counters such prejudices through its willingness to address a broad range of contemporary realities (such as job markets, student demands, technological resources, etc.) Tiseo suggests ultimately that his students learn most efficiently because they are given the opportunity to exercise their own skills and explore their own work. Such opportunity is given through a "project-based", "hands-on" curriculum that does not "test" in order to assess certain areas of knowledge against

pre-prescribed levels of achievement, but rather quizzes in order to mark steps in the learning process.

Lee Rother

Rother explains that the great advantage of media study is its recourse to “a common experience” and its tapping of phenomena that have defined “home” environments as separate from school. He thus decries a disjunction that has been perpetuated by traditional modes of “print oriented” education such that students’ daily “multimedia” engagements have been ignored. One of the great appeals of media education, says Rother, is that the “kids seem a lot more comfortable [...], it’s something they’re familiar and comfortable with.”

Rother traces his own growth as a media teacher in terms of a process of learning to “listen” to his students. He talks about his breakthrough realization of the value of his students’ non-academic “chatter”, noting that prior to this discovery, “it was as if I had never really listened to them.” He adds, “The more I listened to what I once considered ‘worthless’ chatter, the more I began to realize that there was something unexpected and exciting in the way they were talking [...] What was really intriguing was the sophistication of their talk.” Rother highlights the breadth of student knowledge, focusing particularly on the knowledge that is generally disregarded or repressed within conventional classrooms. He comments on his own transgressions, recognizing the culpability of past assumptions about literacy. “When I first began

teaching,” he says, “I assumed that a person was either literate or illiterate.” However, the earlier definition of “literate” has come to be seen as woefully inadequate since it does not account for the many analytical skills that students often display outside of traditional “book” contexts. “I am arguing for schooling that acknowledges knowledge that children acquire in and out of school,” he insists. “Maybe what has to happen is for teachers to stop teaching so much and start learning more, alongside their students.” (Rother 1995)

Rother’s willingness to credit students according to a wider scope of literate skills thus challenges conceptions of the educationally defining knowledge hierarchy. He stresses that the recognition of students’ knowledge means an acceptance of the notion that the teacher is not necessarily in a position of advantage. As Rother states, “My students do not look to me as the ‘key master’ unlocking information for which I alone have access. Instead, I think they look upon me as a navigator or a coach...” He adds that only such a dynamic leads to what he calls “authentic learning”, implying that learning is not dependent on the introduction of something new and previously ungraspable, but rather that learning evolves from what was already there. It is for this reason that Rother claims to have moved from a monolithic emphasis on course material to the study of his pupils.

Judy Brandeis

Similarly, Brandeis stresses the importance of making course material *meaningful* in a way that does not privilege the teacher's understanding. "I think the key is to make it meaningful. Whatever you're teaching, make it meaningful to the student rather than to the teacher," she urges. She also notes that this requires teachers to refrain from imposing their views of "correct" procedure when the students' inclination is to proceed otherwise. Students must be allowed to express themselves from their own level of comprehension, even if the process seems clumsy or inappropriate; only then, suggests Brandeis, can learning take place. She therefore relates the details of lessons she once gave on the subject of television.

The other thing they [the students] had a tendency to do at the time was to replicate a lot of *Saturday Night Live* skits, which, to me, didn't involve much thinking. But that was part of the process, I think. [...] So it wasn't enough for me to say, "You can't do it." I would find the best way to do it was to let them do it and then [question them]: "Did you see what you did here? How different is this, really, than the skit you watched?" To me, that's a learning experience.

Winston Emery

Emery agrees that student knowledge needs a forum for expression and that premature assumptions about young people and about education often leave much of that knowledge out. Such assumptions are most evident, suggests Emery, in the standard educational practices that involve, for instance, the simple one-to-many lecture dynamic of the typical classroom. "In *a lot* of classrooms, teachers stand at the front

and talk to students for a whole lot of time. And they're making all kinds of assumptions about what the students know, don't know, can do, can't do, care to know..." Emery observes how such practices alienate students and turn education into an unnecessarily conflictual experience; he presents this in terms of kids' "difficult time connecting." The idea of "connection" seems uniquely apt because languages are nothing if not processes of connecting. Emery therefore insists that teachers strive to perform from the same representational field occupied by their students. He proposes that "teachers maybe ought to ask [the students], 'What do you know already?', 'What do you need to know?'"

He notes, too, that this surrendering of the floor to the students subverts the traditional teacher-student hierarchy. He talks, for example, about many media teachers' interest in student production work, observing how production can entail the widening of opportunities for the expression of traditionally non-scholastic knowledge. "So this notion of the classroom as being a place where kids produce stuff and where teachers then respond to what they've produced changes, I think, the notion of what teaching has traditionally done." Emery presents the shift, however, as educationally effective in a number of ways. He points, for instance, to the kind of self-assuredness that emanates from students when they are given the opportunity to express what they know instead of attempting to guess at what the teacher knows. Emery asserts that "the quality of the [students'] work is invariably better" and the "voice" is

more confident because “they know what they know.” He adds, “The quality of the writing is better, the expression is clearer, more communicative, than when they’re trying to impress me that they know what I know.”

Janet Sargisson

Like Emery, Sargisson talks about the importance of “connection” for students, and she observes how the media class seems particularly adept at reaching kids. She says that “the kids like to do this, they feel really connected to it.” The thought is repeated later on when she states, “It’s a course where kids connect and where they can find a way in...” The connection is, moreover, not simply viewed as a gimmick; rather, it is perceived as a basic requirement for effective education. Sargisson ties this notion of connection to the opportunity for self-expression, much like the other interviewees. This is most clear when she discusses the importance of the students’ sense of “authorship”. Here, one may conclude from her interest in “voice” that authorship addresses the reflexive awareness of one’s own knowledge, as well as the ability to convey that knowledge. Sargisson therefore remarks: “They [the students] can find a way in to find their voice, and do stuff especially if it’s hands-on. As soon as they realize that it’s very creative and they can have control over this... then the whole idea of authorship which we really want them to learn – they’ll learn it.” She further encapsulates her

own assumptions about student knowledge and its role in education when she asserts, “You want them [the students] to feel it’s theirs”.

Sargisson notices how such an approach is capable of igniting even those students who have difficulties in more conventional school environments. “We have kids here who fall through the cracks,” she says, “and it’s interesting because it’s very much *that* student who will turn on in this course.” She recalls the example of one girl who spent an enormous amount of time and effort while putting together an impressive project for the media class. “This is a kid,... you cannot get her to do anything. I don’t think she ever hands in a paper on time, she’s frequently in the sick room, often doesn’t come at all, late for everything,... But she did *this!*”

Michelle Lukes

When Lukes discusses the media teacher’s relinquishing of his/her status of expertise, she implicates the centrality of student knowledge. She suggests that it is in fact because of the expanse of student knowledge that “you have to accept that you are not necessarily the expert.” As examples, Lukes points to areas of familiarity among students such as television programming (like *The Simpsons*) or video games; she claims that the kids “know things [...] that we can’t know because they grew up with it.” She argues that such familiarity is more reason, not less, to include these knowledges in the workings of the classroom. Lukes elaborates on the argument, noting further that *any*

kid will find media courses “interesting” precisely because of their inclusive approach to what the students already know.

Mike Hughes

Hughes repeats a number of Emery’s points and thus reveals similar assumptions. He refers to his approach as “student-centered” as opposed to “teacher-centered”. In addition, he says that he does not like to stand at the front of the class and tell students what to do because, Hughes argues, “they become passive” in such an environment. “I let them tell me what they need to know,” he explains.

It is in this context that one can understand Hughes’s more radical comments like “I don’t teach”; he also insists, “I don’t change anything they do.” Such remarks reflect an approach that gives students the freedom to express their vast knowledge in their own terms. They furthermore reflect the extent to which learning is perceived to be the responsibility of the student rather than the teacher because it is so dependent on the individual experiences and competencies of each person. Essentially, then, the epistemological assumptions that frame the concept of the knower propose that students act as their own teachers. The assumption is even reflected in Hughes’ efforts to have the students teach each other. He observes, for instance, the process by which he gradually becomes less and less of an instructive resource for his pupils. “After a few weeks, they don’t ask me anymore. They ask each other.” This must be so because only the individual knower is

assumed to have access to every element of his/her knowledge, and the students are seen to often be more in tuned with one another's learning needs since they are going through similar experiences. The teacher's role becomes one of guide in the process of enabling students to explore the limits of their own abilities. "The kids have a lot of abilities," Hughes says, "but they don't usually get the chance to demonstrate those abilities." He is committed to rectifying such inhibitive practices. Thus, Hughes remarks that "we don't want to stifle their creativity"; although he adds, "but they need some direction."

Stephanie Fortune

Fortune similarly talks about the kind of *guidance* that is offered by a media teacher, and the role that students play in teaching each other. "I try to have them help each other," she says. This is done in Fortune's class mostly through discussion and group work. Also, Fortune recognizes how the implications of student knowledge affect the manner of instruction. She explains the difference between guiding students in a media class and in an English class. She states, "I do not guide them to any [particular] answers [in the media class]. I try to do that in English as well, but I still have more of a hold on things." This discrepant degree of control Fortune attributes to the variant levels of student knowledge that get addressed in the different classes. "My approach is different," she claims with regard to the media class. In the English class, "there are more structures to give them. But in media,

aside from focusing on concepts, I'm much more apt to hand them the ball. Because they know so much about media, they know much more than I do." Thus, Fortune may be seen as embracing a wider concept of scholastically relevant student knowledge. She conceives of the importance of student knowledge in relation to a notion of "audience"; she views her students as audiences that bring their own meanings to the texts they encounter. She therefore asserts that it does not make her uncomfortable to acknowledge those areas of student competence that are typically ignored. Rather, she insists that such acknowledgment is essential to a more authentic learning environment. "I know that they know more than I do about what's going on," Fortune admits. "It would be disregarding them as audiences if I gave them only what I know to be true."

Fortune implicates, moreover, a recognition of the way meaningfulness evades consideration in situations where students cannot *connect*. She also observes a persistent and disturbing lack of connection for many students. "A lot of kids have trouble connecting," she laments. She says this is evident in their common resistance to questions of meaning as they often recoil from such inquiries as: "What does it *mean*? What could this *mean*?" Fortune sees her work as a media teacher as a countering response to such a trend of despondency and meaninglessness. She consequently reveals her assumption that the introduction of traditionally excluded material into the academic realm

has the potential to make schooling more meaningful and therefore more productive for students. It is furthermore assumed that meaning depends on the repertoire of knowledge that defines each student.

Philip Corcos

Philip Corcos explains different strategies he uses in the media class to make the subject less “restrictive” and to involve more student knowledge. He observes, for instance, how the introduction of ‘media’ to the students is achieved by trying “to get the students to speak about the media as opposed to me talking about it.” He also describes production techniques where kids are encouraged to invoke their own ideas and to direct themselves in the least prescriptive way possible. Corcos says, “I encourage the children to break out of the scripts and to break out of the mold of a guide that’s too restrictive so that, you know, I usually ask them to write a guide for themselves as opposed to a script.”

Furthermore, he stresses the importance of addressing material from the students’ own perspective; he refers to this as “work[ing] at their level”. Such an approach, he claims, deals respectfully with subject matter that students already consider on a daily basis. “If the fad today is *The Simpsons*, let’s talk about *The Simpsons*,” he says. “Let’s talk about why it’s a fad.” His openness to such topics and his recognition of the breadth of student knowledge that uniquely comes into play in a media class indicate the same epistemological assumptions shared by his fellow interviewees. The point is that learning is still seen to proceed from the

knowledge that already exists; and when that knowledge is acknowledged as vast, the pedagogical situation is quite altered. Corcos demonstrates this awareness in his discussion of the difference between a drama class and a media class. He asserts that the defining characteristic of the media class is the extent of prior knowledge that students can bring to the material.

But because they don't have this knowledge of theater, they're more willing to accept what we give them, because it's new to them even though theater is like five thousand years old. Whereas television, it's a part of them; they think they own it, they feel as if they know it more than anyone else, and because of that they'll fight you – they'll fight me [...]

Brenda Wilson

Wilson does not speak too much about the implications of prior knowledge but she does make a couple of key observations that impinge on the assumptions about the knower. First, she notes that “in a course like media, you build in a big component where they [the students] are allowed to express themselves [...] It allows them to explore media but also to explore something of themselves.” Thus, self-exploration is emphasized as an important aspect of learning just as it is associated with media study. It is also clear from another of Wilson's comments that the “self” being examined is defined in rather expansive terms. Wilson assumes that high school students are complex individuals with broad ranges of knowledge and experience that directly affect their education, particularly as it pertains to media. She observes, “When

young people come to you, they come almost fully formed. So we're dealing with a lot of baggage".

Linda Novek

Novek reveals her sense of the significance of student "connection" when she describes her most cherished moments of vindication as a media teacher. "And it's a course where the kids have said to me over and over – and honest to God, I can never get over it – 'Your class is the only class I look forward to, Mrs Novek'. And Oh my God! It's like they just gave me an Academy Award." Novek stresses more than once the joy and excitement expressed by students in her media classes. She also attributes this "effervescence" as she calls it to the fact that the course addresses a body of knowledge that is usually left silent and with which the students are intimately familiar. She says that "they're so excited, because the body of knowledge is their culture, it's popular culture [...]" Furthermore, this familiarity enables every student to feel knowledgeable in the class, which is different, explains Novek, from other scholastic experiences. "There's no such thing... you don't feel stupid in a media class. Everybody knows something, everybody knows something, and there are no right or wrong answers," she states.

As a result, "they [the students] have all kinds of stuff to offer me," insists Novek. She therefore claims it to be advantageous rather than intimidating to open up opportunities for students to speak, even though her monopolistic position of power may be compromised. She recognizes

that some may view the inclusive practices as a “fight”, but she prefers to see it otherwise. Her perspective is expressed in the way that she demonstrates a commitment to making texts available. This is obvious, for instance, in Novek’s account of her evolution into a “passionate” media teacher; “[i]t all happened very naturally,” she says. The process, she remarks, came out of her drive to make lessons meaningful by using the non-academic areas of student knowledge to illuminate her traditional course material. She thus notes how, as an English teacher, she is perceived to be the antagonist of the media teacher; and she relies on this balance. “Because as the English teacher, I’m fighting the media teacher. Because the kids aren’t reading. Why aren’t they reading? They’re watching too much film. But I’ve learned as the English teacher, don’t fight it, use it.” Novek therefore explains that her primary goal is to get students to broaden their understanding of texts and to consequently see the world in new ways. However, she insists that this can only realistically happen if the teacher starts from a familiar place that does not alienate the students from the outset. This is the attraction of teaching media. Novek recounts,

I started with the film *Emma*. I could never get my English students to read *Emma* by Jane Austen, no way, I mean, might as well blow my brains out; it’s unrealistic, it could never happen. [...] And I say ‘But you know, it’s through these great films – and filmmakers know that people aren’t reading, that’s why the great classics are coming to us through film now – it’s through film that I can turn you on to these wonderful narratives and maybe one day when you’re

twenty-five, thirty, you might want to pick it up. You might be able to then.'

So what I do is I expose them to *Emma*, then I show them the 90s version of *Clueless* and I say 'Did you know that *Clueless* is the Jane Austen *Emma* story?' [They respond,] 'No! Come on!' And they *see it!* And they're *shocked!* And I put it in a historical context for them.

Novek further discusses the true interchange that occurs in the media class. "They teach me all kinds of things just as I teach them," she declares. This is seen to be one of the great appeals of media education, as the vision of the student as teacher is thus re-submitted, echoing above statements by Hughes, Fortune, etc. "They have so much more to bring to the table, much more than any other kind of class. So it's very exciting for them and for me." Ultimately Novek argues that it is this sense of connection, derived from the invocation of prior knowledge as well as the association with a recognizable world, that has the most profound educative impact. She observes with exhilaration how the students "start to notice things."

And they come to me; they are excited, I am excited. You don't get that in the English Classroom. You don't get it. This is so immediate; it gives them the skills that they use immediately in their own world. They take them, and they are immediately applicable out there in the real world, outside of the classroom. They see a real purpose, I think, to what they're doing. Because one of the big questions that kids will ask the English teacher or any teacher is *What's the point?*

Critical Independence is the Main Social Value (for Education)

The assumptions related to the value of intellectual independence can be called ethical assumptions; they deal with considerations of what

education *ought* to accomplish. These assumptions address the sense of purpose expressed by the teachers in their understanding of the importance of what they do. They address socio-political factors like power and ideology, placing schooling within the context of the larger society. Here, the media teachers unanimously agree that their goal as educators is to foster intellectual independence by nurturing a capacity for critical thought. They insist that students must be taught to question, not to blankly accept. Questioning, the interviewees assume, is the most powerful tool a person can be given to counter the manipulative forces that can emerge from the incompleteness accompanying human constructions of the world. To the goal of developing critical thought, the teachers also add the goal of fostering the ability to make one's self heard, which is frequently translated into the "writing" of texts. Here, reading and writing in their expanded definitions are viewed as political safeguards in the interest of protecting and furthering people's freedoms.

Abigail Anderson Goodman

Anderson Goodman discusses the relationship between media education and empowerment. She speaks of it directly when she associates the movement with the drive to give teachers the power to enable students to demonstrate their constructive abilities. Each teacher "needs to be empowered to allow kids to constantly produce these texts," she says. It is interesting to note that, while it has been argued that

student production implies a relinquishing of control, Anderson Goodman suggests that it also demands a new and greater power for teachers. It takes security, after all, to give up control and to thus welcome uncertainty; such security is of course power.

Anderson Goodman also speaks of empowerment indirectly when she asserts the importance of students' ability to "take responsibility to show [] that [they] can construct and deconstruct". She relates this to their awareness of the political implications of texts in terms of the way texts "position" people. Such emphases on empowerment are contextualized within assumptions about the necessity for self-expression (ie. "writing"), for critical thinking, and for the exploration of relationships. This is clear in Anderson Goodman's praise for "cultural studies" as a pedagogical approach: "And suddenly there would be a reason for writing, there would be a reason for developing critical thought, there would be a connection between a whole bunch of areas which a lot of people in education are desperately trying to keep as separate [...]"

Frank Tiseo

Tiseo also highlights the centrality of self-expression in its capacity to help students assimilate ideas about the ways in which media can affect people. In one of his course profiles, he defines communication as "an activity designed to influence the behaviour of people"; he therefore stresses the importance of having students consider the processes of

such influence. Tiseo perceives this kind of consideration to be most effective in the context of student production. Though he focuses on practical work, he nonetheless makes certain to point out that one main objective is “to develop the student’s ability to make critical judgements about program content and production values”, particularly since he recognizes society to be “visually dominated”. He claims that he is teaching students so that they can become “successful” adults within contemporary circumstances. By “successful”, he means employable but he also means aware.

Lee Rother

Rother similarly acknowledges the way media education can “encourage critical thinking”. He even points out that the media education movement is defined by such “catch phrases” as “critical thinking” and “inquiry approaches”. Rother therefore proudly observes that “media literacy invites young people to reflect [on], question and challenge the value messages in all texts.” According to Rother, these are fundamental justifications for teaching media.

Rother’s involvement with government projects and his former position as president of the now disbanded Association for Media Education – Quebec (AMEQ) also indicate his recognition of the political import of alternative educational movements. He thus expresses a concern with educational reform that ties activism to efforts toward the development of independent thinkers. He accordingly announces a

hesitant optimism toward current proposals emanating from the Ministry of Education because “it’s really almost looking at the students in terms of what’s happening around them, rather than just on what the teachers have to teach them.”

In addition, Rother comments gleefully on the “complaints” that he often hears from his students about their critical compulsions toward media texts. Rother suggests that such complaints vindicate his efforts as an educator. He thus reveals his own ethical assumptions about what education is intended to do. He is less clear, however, on the *why*, although it is possible that his neglect to account for this reasoning indicates a taken-for-granted assumption about the inherent value of critical thinking.

Judy Brandeis

Likewise, Brandeis stresses critical thinking without necessarily explaining why this is valuable, perhaps assuming as well that the value goes without saying. She does say that the development of “critical thinking skills about media texts” should parallel what is taught about traditional texts, relying, presumably, on the arguments that underscore such traditional teaching practices. She does say, too, that critical thought is related to the important idea that “kids should know that they themselves should become the ones to decide what’s good or bad for them”. Empowerment gets indirectly addressed as well when Brandeis characterizes the pedagogy of the media class in terms of its ability to

permit “ownership”. She says, “I’d go in [to class] knowing what we were going to do but the kids would take it often into a direction that I couldn’t have even thought of if I had tried... and a much better direction.” She recognizes this to be a valuable scholastic dynamic because it negates the possibilities for boredom and passivity; and she says that it can happen in any class “if you give the kids some ownership of it”.

Winston Emery

Emery is quite explicit in expressing his assumptions about the relationship between concepts of critical independence, media education, and education in general. He declares his commitment to a notion that “no longer think[s] about education generally as something that’s transmitted from somebody’s head to another”. Rather, he sees education as a fluid process, derived from the “fact [that] people have to construct meaning”. He therefore conceives of a curriculum revolving around meanings instead of units of things to know, and he is consequently more comfortable in proposing a collapse of traditional teacher-student hierarchies because the hierarchy is seen to confound meanings more than elucidate them. Emery ties the dissolution of hierarchies to media education specifically and to its objective toward critical thought. “If we’re trying to develop a critical independence on the part of kids,” he says, “which is what media education is all about, then you have to develop a non-hierarchical style of teaching.”

Emery further relates his emphasis on media education's brand of critical independence to political concerns about access to the public sphere. He notes that

the trend in mass communication at least in the public sphere for a greater and greater amount of discourse being controlled by fewer and fewer people all of whom [have] a similar kind of ideological bend is disturbing to me. There are fewer and fewer public spaces where, I think, the public interest gets addressed and I think the closing down of that is one of the serious things that needs to be looked at.

He states that he perceives media education to be the ultimate remedy to such unsettling circumstances, or at least the most effective means of dealing with the problem because it provokes the kind of inquiry necessary to counter the trend. Media classes, suggests Emery, give students the opportunity to examine the import of various situations and to deal with the question of *So what?*, which Emery says is “really an important question, and [one] that has to do with values”. He further observes that media education promotes critical independence to the extent that it highlights for students the degree to which they can articulate their ideas, turning this issue of access into a concern. “I just don’t know if they [the students] have the opportunity to articulate [their values] in the public sphere, and that’s a concern,” says Emery. “I’m not sure if they see that as being a significant problem but that’s an educational problem. [...] That’s an important issue... more important, I think, than *what’s* being said. I think that is an educational challenge”.

Janet Sargisson

Janet Sargisson refers to the kind of critical independence fostered by a media class in terms of critical distance and in terms of awareness. She states that she teaches so that students will “be able to stand back and observe”; more compellingly, she describes the biggest advantage of teaching media as the contribution to making “kids [] more aware”. Sargisson thus justifies her work by noting how the students “say that they can never watch television the same way. They’re looking and they’re analyzing... there’s no going back.” Again, it is assumed that the primary educational value lies in the resistance to passivity experienced by young people toward their (visual) environments. This countering force against student blankness is seen to derive from media education’s ability to invoke critical stances toward typically unexamined and non-academic stimuli.

Michelle Lukes

When Lukes proclaims that “we teach them to question *everything*”, she is evidently making a statement about the importance of critical thinking within a media classroom. She extends this notion when she adds the comment that promoting such skepticism “is what education is for.” Her assumption about the primacy of intellectual independence as the main value driving society’s educational system is consequently revealed. It takes precedence over other values that might mitigate against the advancement of skepticism. Lukes therefore

expresses no remorse as she acknowledges that through her teaching, she sometimes feels “like I’m blackening their innocence.” Education, assumes Lukes, is not about safeguarding innocence; in fact, its role is conceptualized as quite the contrary. “We do them [the students] a great disservice by not addressing the issues [of media] in schools,” she insists, even though she recognizes the disillusionment that inevitably ensues. She notes further that media education is intended to prevent students from making hasty assumptions and from taking “images” for granted. It gets them to consider, for instance, the “purposes” and “agendas” that might impinge on media artifacts, so that they can make more informed – and freer – judgments.

Mike Hughes

In accordance with his project-based approach, Hughes discusses issues of critical independence mostly in terms of student production. He thus explains how the individual and group work assignments structure the class such that the students “are always working on their own things” and “everyone’s work [in a given day] is different.” This is essential to the emphasis on self-direction that Hughes hopes to impart as he promotes an attitude of responsibility among students toward their own learning. Such an attitude is assumed to lie at the core of media education and indeed of education in general. Thus, Hughes claims, for instance, that when the students are working with multi-media design, he “encourage[s] them to read the [software] manuals and to use the

‘help’ menus” in order to find things out for themselves. This is an extension of his “non-teaching” style of teaching for which he refuses to spoon-feed students with answers because he says that “they [will] become passive”.

Hughes is adamant about ensuring that students remain active, aware and involved; he will use any tool he can to fulfill this goal, including a reliance on peer pressure to keep students motivated. Hughes interestingly observes that peer pressure can be put to positive use in the maintenance of motivation. He explains how big projects for which groups of students each contribute a part tend to keep the students focused “because nobody wants their section to suck.” He also celebrates the fact that his strategy of allowing the kids to formulate their own project objectives encourages them to think for themselves and permits them to consequently arrive at discoveries unknown even to the teacher. This, it is suggested, is one of the most rewarding and justificatory aspects of teaching media. To exemplify the point, Hughes refers to a particular graphic effect and proudly states, “I know how to do it now, but that’s because a student showed me.”

Stephanie Fortune

Fortune reiterates a number of the ideas expressed by the others, and she adds a couple of her own. First, she, like Rother and Sargisson, comments on the feedback from students who realize that their viewing habits have changed. She says that her students complain about

becoming more cynical, and that they confront her with statements like “I can’t enjoy things the same way.” Fortune remarks, “I say ‘good’,” revealing her assumption that media education is *supposed* to interfere with unconsciously pleasant engagements with surrounding influences. She says that her goal is in fact to get students to look at things differently and more profoundly. Fortune wants students to examine texts beyond surfaces, and it is this emphasis of probing inquiry that defines her sense of critical thought. “The whole course is about looking beyond the flash,” she declares.

Fortune furthermore aligns herself with the other teachers who stress the importance of self-directed educational environments. She talks about a research project assigned in her class for which the topic was to be chosen entirely by the student from any area of media that was of interest. The objective, says Fortune, was “to truly make it an *investigation*” as opposed to an encyclopedic recapitulation, although she concedes that some students had difficulty and that misunderstandings of the purpose of the assignment produced less than ideal results. Nevertheless, she remains firm in her devotion to the principle of self-direction; it is central to her efforts in “trying to get them to think.”

The principle is also associated with Fortune’s insistence on the role that power plays in the media class or in education generally. For, she highlights the way the media class lends itself particularly well to an avoidance of neat little endings and definite answers. As a teacher of

media, says Fortune, “you have to accept there won’t always be neat little products in the end (which is hard for teachers because they like completion).” Fortune thus recalls an applicable assertion made by Rother where he remarked that “teaching media is very messy.” She claims, “That was an important thing that he said. And it’s true, it is messy.” Here, “messy” addresses the uncertainty implicated in media education as well as the related acknowledgment and encouragement of the power of students. As Fortune explains, one of the most important aspects of teaching media involves “letting them feel their own *power*.”

Philip Corcos

Corcos expresses a specific concern with issues of media influence, especially as they pertain to desensitization, consumerism and the simple and seamless regulating of daily life. So, according to him, critical independence deals directly with these matters. He notes, therefore, how his teaching attempts to counter such phenomena by raising student awareness. Corcos talks about how young people “have become completely desensitized to disasters”, how the advertising ethic “just constantly attack[s] them”, and how television is so central to their daily routine that kids can’t imagine going one week without it. He tries to have students consider such issues in the classroom; one strategy he uses is to ask them what they think. He recounts, for example, “I said to them ‘What if I told you you can’t watch TV for a week and I unplugged your TV set? What would you do?’” He recalls that a student responded,

"I'll kill you," and that he replied that it was the answer he expected, thus initiating some discussion of the role television plays in the students' lives. Ultimately, says Corcos, his goal is to foster a capacity for critical thinking that entails the ability to observe with some "objectivity", some distance, some neutrality. This, he proposes, is the primary objective of media education; it is to prevent students from apprehending stimuli merely by "instinct" and to encourage them to become more aware and more intentional. It is only in awareness, argues Corcos, that students can protect their freedom against the dangers represented by the manipulative potential of media. He refers specifically to the "master manipulators" and he notes how ignorance to such forces ensures that "it's going to become very dangerous for them to grow up in this world." Corcos states that

If there's anything that I'm going to try to get across to the kids [...] it's to become a bit more cold towards the media, see it from more of a global vision than just themselves. [...] I'm happy when a student can back out a little bit and say 'Okay, now I understand why I like that show, now I understand why three hundred million people watch it every day.' But, you know, it's very hard, so one of the things I do is, let's say, I'll put on a show [and] as soon as I see the students begin to react instinctively, I'll turn off the TV. And they begin to wonder and they start to get the message.

Brenda Wilson

Wilson similarly reveals a protective impetus to her teaching; she too wants to protect students from potentially harmful influences like those promoting repressive concepts of body image or racial stereotypes.

She analogously refers to her media class as a “self defense course” with the prime goal of developing awareness. Wilson therefore discusses with her students such problems as what happens “if you don’t see yourself in the media” as well as questions like: “Why don’t women like their bodies?” She also raises issues of consumerism and of the social pressures to consume that are perpetuated by the media. These considerations are tied to a notion of critical independence through Wilson’s recognition that they open up possibilities for alternative forms of engagement with everyday material. Thus, Wilson emphasizes the connection between media education and the ability to make decisions as well as changes in one’s environment. The result, she implicitly argues, is empowerment. Wilson thus demonstrates her ethical assumptions when she claims that the point behind teaching media is to have students “*feel* that if you’re not happy with anything that you see then you [can] damn well get out there and [...] make something that you do love.” She aims to make certain that students know that “they can change [things], they can make lots of changes; they can change by legislation, they can change by not consuming or by consuming.” Finally, Wilson justifies her work in noting that “What it [the media class] gives them is it gives them tools to enjoy life because they can make decisions. They have to feel that they can make decisions in life about a whole raft of things.” Though she doesn’t say it specifically, one can

interpret this decision-making ability as an indication of an expanded level of freedom.

Linda Novek

Novek clearly shares the ethical assumptions that have been outlined in the interpretation of the other interviewees' statements. She addresses many of the same issues that are seen in her colleagues' comments. She likewise expresses a concern over possibilities for manipulation, citing such problematic areas as rampant consumerism, gender bias, sexual exploitation, and violence. She explains, for instance, that she talks with her students "about Coca-Cola, so they understand that when they're drinking a Coke, it's a lot more than *that* Coke." She talks with them about violence in children's programming both in terms of content and form, and she talks with them about representations of women, too. Novek describes her openness to confronting controversial issues like those surrounding sexuality, remarking on the way she has "taken the romance out of someone's breasts for these kids." She insists, finally, that all of the material in the media class is studied with the intention of minimizing the potential effects of manipulation.

Novek, like the other teachers, wants her students to be more thoughtful in their present as well as their future lives. "I want them to get some distance from the product," she says, "instead of just being mindless, and understand what's being done *to* them." She asserts that

these actions *upon* the students can be countered through critical awareness. Most poignantly, though, Novek acknowledges a sense of her own instructive impact on the future, pointing, for instance, to questions she poses to students about the choices they will have in the raising of their own kids. “I say, ‘Okay, so when you are a parent, are you going to perhaps be a little more thoughtful, or sit down with your kid, with some of these shows, now that you understand how children are being influenced?’” This forward-looking emphasis on the expansion of people’s options also reflects the fundamental connection between media education and freedom, positing media education as a profoundly political act. This is compellingly evident in Novek’s account of an experience that she had in a restaurant – an experience that she recalls having discussed with her class.

It was two weeks ago, and I can’t remember what restaurant I went to on Mount Royal, and there were two mannequins, full sized mannequins – Dominatrixes – wearing leather. And the one that really got to me, the second Dominatrix, [was] with the black leather, the hat, the chain around her neck, and they covered her in Saran Wrap. And they’re lined up [outside the door], young [people] in their twenties. I said [to myself], “You know, nothing’s changed.”

You see because when I talk to my students, [they say] “Oh, Mrs. Novek, you analyze too much. Things are different now.” And [they say], “Why should anything change, they’ve always been that way.”

Anyway, I said to my friend I won’t eat in that restaurant. “Uhhh,” she said, “Come on, I just want breakfast.”

“I’m offended,” I said. “I’m a woman.” I said, “If that were a Jew, if that were a black person,... please! I mean, they would have bashed the restaurant down. But repressive acts against women are tolerated, it’s ridiculous, and no one thinks twice about it.”

Anyway, I told my students. I said I felt very strongly. And you know what? At some point they're going to run into that, and they're going to remember.

Overview

A close reading of the interviewees' responses permits the delineation of four groups of assumptions. In terms of ontology, these media educators stress that reality, especially as it pertains to high school students, is constructed by media. This area of assumption pays particular attention to the ways in which meanings are viewed as contingent and therefore relative, incomplete, and inconclusive. It is modified by a second group of assumptions that deals with the conceptualization of that which is known. The epistemological approach to the "object" of knowledge is revealed in the teachers' statements to be linguistically construed in an analogy of "text". The teachers consequently implicate and modify notions of language, literacy, texts, disciplines, reading and writing. The epistemology of the "subject", to whatever extent the knower can be distinguished from the known, relies on a further assumption that what one *already* knows determines what one *can* know. This area of assumption is uncovered from the interviewees' persistent (and, at times, radical) emphasis on the prior knowledge of students as the fundamental determinant of learning. Finally, the ethical assumptions are found in the educators' accounts of the purpose for their work. Here, it becomes clear that all of the interviewees perceive the value of critical independence to be the driving

force behind their teaching and behind their sense of education's place in society. Critical independence is posited as an awareness of influences beyond surfaces and of the ability to choose among the maximum amount of alternative perceptions. It is at this level of assumption that media education therefore becomes consciously political in the pursuit of optimal freedom.

Section III:

Interpretive Context –
Education and Communication

CHAPTER 5

QUEBEC MEDIA EDUCATORS' APPROACHES AND ASSUMPTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIA EDUCATION THEORY

Part 1

The concurrence of assumptions among the members of the sample group of educators suggests that all of these individuals raise specific and shared questions. Perhaps unlike any teachers outside of a media education movement, they place priorities on the role of popular culture within the formal classroom, they challenge traditional practices of course *delivery*, and they insist on the interrogation of textual forms as well as content while they contemplate the meanings of the *medium*. Still, these educators also display quite different strategies and attitudes such that the commonality of assumptions is easily obscured.

The difficulty is that other assumptions come into play and there consequently arise variations as well as conflicts. This situation is not particular to the twelve interviewees; it describes, in fact, the history of the media education movement as a whole. Indeed, Renee Hobbs points to the legacy of antagonism generated by the diversity within the movement as she recalls Bob McCannon's observation that "Whenever media literacy educators get together, they always circle the wagons – and shoot in." (Hobbs 1998: 16) Thus, it is enlightening to see how the group of Quebec educators, as a microcosm of media educators in general, diverge even within the expressed assumptions about reality

construction, textual study, prior knowledge, and the value of critical independence. This chapter therefore examines the context of discrepancy in relation to the first two assumptions about the construction of reality and the “textuality” of meaning. Part 2, in the next chapter, discusses the last two assumptions regarding knowledge repertoires and the value of independent thought.

Reality is Constructed by Media

As seen in chapter 2, the twelve educators who were interviewed all agree that reality is constructed by media. Hobbs notes that U.S. educators at the 1993 Media Literacy National Leadership Conference also agreed that “media messages are constructed” and that “media representations play a role in people’s understanding of social reality”(1998:17-18), which amounts to the same thing. The concept is indeed quite central to all media educators. Nonetheless, much debate and disparity persist with regard to teaching practices that follow from such concepts. Why the discordance? The interviewees offer some enlightening insight into the reasons for the disputes. For, the variations among them seem to arise from discordant assumptions about the roles of *consent*, of *reception*, of *uncertainty*, and of *production* in the conveyance of the construction of reality.

The role of consent

According to a holistic approach, consent is integral to the formulation of meaning and hence to learning. It means that not only do people negotiate meaning through constructions but that the process of negotiation is an exercise of individual power. People are understood to have the capacity as well as the propensity to consent to know. Such an attribute is characterized by Giroux and Simon in terms of people's active involvement with their environments since Giroux and Simon stress that consent is *learned*. "That consent is learned begs the question of what kinds of pedagogical processes are at work through which people actively rather than passively identify their own needs and desires with particular forms and relations of meaning." (Giroux & Simon 15) It is additionally noteworthy that the authors speak about both media and education simultaneously when they refer to pedagogical processes, claiming that "Any practice which intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning is a pedagogical practice." (230)

Thus, one observes how some of the interviewees describe teaching methods that concur with these holistic assumptions about the importance of consent as it relates to the construction of reality. These educators highlight the centrality of the role that students play in acceding to their own understandings of both mediated messages and classroom activities. Winston Emery thus explains his process of

“negotiating the curriculum” with his students, and he notes that he always gives his classes the choice between pursuing a more negotiative or more doctrinal schooling process. Michelle Lukes discusses the difficulties in maintaining structure in a media class that so often generates high levels of energy. She therefore emphasizes the necessity for student consent, explaining that “we have to come to an understanding as a class”. Brandeis and Hughes stress their practice of allowing students to pursue projects of their own choosing; and Hughes further observes, “I let them tell me what they need to know.” Sargisson, Brandeis, Novek, and Anderson Goodman all refer to the significance of making classroom work “available”, “meaningful to the students”, or “theirs”. Novek’s discussion of the way she chooses course material, basing her decision on an awareness of students’ questions about why they have to study particular texts or how many pages comprise the required reading, also reveals her sensitivity to the need for her pupils’ assent. Novek recognizes her students’ power to disregard her, and to choose not to learn. “I could never get my English students to read *Emma* by Jane Austen,” she says. “I mean, there’s always a part of me that says ‘Oh my God, they should read the classics’. But I’m being real, as well, okay. [Because the] first thing a kid asks is ‘How many pages?’” It is clear, then, that in their attentiveness to the conditions under which students are most likely to consent to learn, these teachers attempt to forge a partnership with their students and to subsequently emphasize

the active role that individuals play in constructing their own interactions with the world. Those who focus on consent also inherently accept the decisive power that students have as well as their right to that power.

The opposite to the fostering of consensual learning environments is paternalism. Masterman regards the paternalistic drive within media education movements to be the primary flaw associated with Leavisite moralism; he notes that it is “an essentially *middle-class, defensive and deeply paternalistic movement*, unjustifiably confident in the assertion of its own standards and judgements” (1985:59). One is therefore led to recognize such antithetical positions toward the role of consent in the statements of Brenda Wilson and Philip Corcos who both express assumptions that indicate a moralistic bend in their approaches to their teaching.

Wilson and Corcos still agree that reality is constructed by media, however, they view this phenomenon of construction as largely acting *upon* students. This is clear in Wilson’s motive to “protect” students by “developing intelligence” which she claims is fundamentally tied to “music and the Arts.” She posits a uni-directional model of construction and consequently engages in teaching strategies that discount a need for consent. For instance, projects supposedly designed to foster creativity are pre-tailored by the teacher and assigned categorically, thus rendering student interests or objections moot. Corcos is similarly protective and

prescriptive. He explains, “in a way, I’m saying to them *be careful*”, and he bases this attitude on the understanding that students “just go with the flow. They don’t seem to have a mind of their own”. Corcos is therefore comfortable in pursuing a teaching style that looks at media in terms of “this is how it’s built; this is how much it cost to make; this is the purpose and the meaning and the message behind it. Now study that.” His position is somewhat confusing because he *does* recognize the role of consent in other circumstances; he states, for example, “This is why I like to stay away from too much theory. It turns them [the students] off [...] They’re here because they want to create.” One may therefore reasonably suspect that Corcos’ students experience a problematic inconsistency in their media class encounters with the teacher. It is, moreover, an inconsistency that seems to arise from conflicting assumptions about the degree of active thought and choice that students bring to their engagements with meaning.

The role of reception

The notion of consent is, then, related to two other ideas that generate inconsistencies and discrepancies in teacher practices in attendance to the construction of reality: the notion of “reception”, and the notion of “certainty”. Reception deals with differing perspectives on the level of student *activity*, while certainty addresses the extent to which teachers feel justified in offering interpretations as absolutes. Clearly, an

approach that values consent also assumes that “receivers” are nonetheless active and, by consequence, that absolute interpretations are therefore highly presumptive and unjustifiable. Such an approach relies on the assumption that neither ownership patterns nor market forces nor producers’ political allegiances or manipulative intentions can ultimately *control* how people make sense of texts (Bazalgette 1992: 205). If they could, then education would be pointless.

Thus, the teachers who ignore the matter of consent fall victim to the same problem found in such media education documents as the curriculum guidelines of Scotland; the guideline discusses, for instance, “images whose meanings are carefully constructed by someone else” (8). It is the same paradox expressed by American psychologist and researcher Robert Kubey who reported to *The New York Times* that “most [television] viewing involves less concentration and alertness - and is experienced more passively - than just about any other daily activity” (August 5, 1990). He then argues in *Media & Values* that “Formal media education is critical” (10) on the basis that the commercial domination of media is corrupting youth. Through advertisements promoting quick-fixes and through programming giving instruction on ideal body types or the measures of success, the media have, suggests Kubey, contributed to the widespread drug problems, eating disorders and suicides among adolescents (1990b: 9). But the perspective toward passivity is muddled. For, if young people, or any people, are accepting certain ideas that the

media apparently encourage, it is not because they lack the training to “take the media seriously”, as Kubey proposes. In fact, it is quite the contrary; accedence to a specific point of view suggests that the person has taken the medium rather seriously indeed.

Such confusion is again discussed by Armand and Michele Mattelart who account for it in terms of the inadequacy of concepts of like “reception” and “consumption”. These concepts, assert the authors,

are both quite unsatisfactory because they are based on the postulate of a decisive break between the sending pole and the receiving pole. This break introduces the idea of a passive attitude on the part of the receivers, or even their fusion with the receptacle; it also introduces the idea that the instance of consumption is reducible to a phenomenon rather than having to be comprehended as a process. (72)

This, then, is ultimately the problem associated with the idea of “one-way communication” which is often brought to bear on justifications for media education. The Council of Europe has stated that the place of mass media education in the curriculum is necessitated by virtue of the manipulation that one-way media can perform; it is therefore the school’s responsibility to ward off the dangers of media indoctrination (Gambiez 5).

One-way communication is, however, a troublesome notion because of its assumption of the receiver’s passivity. As Cary Bazalgette points out, “the assumption that audiences are passive and gullible is fast losing ground to the idea that audiences *make* meanings from texts, rather than having meanings thrust upon them. This opens up a broad

area of informational and conceptual investigation that is immensely significant for media education" (1992: 214-215). Indeed, numerous media education scholars have stressed the centrality of the *active* audience. Murdock and Phelps cite Richard Hoggart's early and influential position against the notion of a "passive zombie-like audience"; they explain that all people, regardless of their background or "media" training, "constantly measure what is offered to them against the standard of their personal experience" (39). From this viewpoint, "the impact of media material comes to be seen in terms of a complex interaction rather than a simple reaction, and the important question to ask becomes; what do people *do with* the material they select? rather than, what does the material *do to* the people who receive it?" (Murdock & Phelps 39-40)

Of course, various communication technologies may be indisputably one-way media in the sense that viewers, for instance, cannot at their own discretion add their voices to television dialogue or re-arrange the images on a movie screen. Yet, even this observation is perhaps more misleading than helpful, and not merely because so-called "interactive" technologies have become a part of the contemporary cultural vocabulary. The problem, of course, is that manipulation tends to get construed as a strictly one-way process, and the Council of Europe is careful to differentiate between manipulative imposition and *communication* which is always two-way; thus, the medium "does not

establish communication [...] It provides a one-way transmission [...such that] a real danger exists of increasing manipulation and indoctrination”

(5). Indeed, all bad things that might arise from media involvement tend to be understood as things that happen *to* people, whereas positive outcomes are always credited to individual intelligence, creativity and strength. Such is human nature, perhaps. Nevertheless, this kind of theorizing confuses understandings of the construction of reality because it inconsistently postulates different modes of interaction with meaning.

Pedagogical methods are also adversely affected by such ingrained contradictions. On the one hand, educators may logically extend assumptions about active involvement to the classroom dynamic. They might agree with Masterman that “it is scarcely possible to pursue a pedagogy within which students are treated as the recipients of pre-ordained information and ideas, rather than as active makers of meaning in their own right.” (1985: 30) On the other hand, they may still cling to a paradigm of one-way media influence and manipulation. Such is the case with the Scottish curriculum, which examines the meanings “constructed by someone else” and yet promotes an “inductive methodology”, a “process-based study”, a “participatory [learning] experience”, while proclaiming the instructive value of a strategy in which “students are not being told what to think, what to enjoy.”

(curriculum guideline 4)

Inconsistencies between assumptions about constructedness and reception can be witnessed in several of the interviewees' accounts of their work. Corcos reveals that he wants kids to "understand that there is actually work behind it [the media product]". He wants them to "focus", to actively engage with the texts, to have "some interaction [...] as opposed to myself feeding the information and they just watch TV with a glazed look in their eyes." However, he repeatedly states his assumptions about the students' passivity, and this seems to undermine his hope for constructive learning as it inevitably must colour his teaching methods. After all, insists Corcos in frustration, the students *do* have that glaze in their eyes; "they've been completely taken in". Moreover, Corcos seems ambivalent in those instances when he does recognize his students' engagement; he says that the big disadvantage of the media class is the fact that the kids will fight him on issues, thinking that they know better. The trouble with their fervour, explains Corcos, is that "a lot of them refuse to accept the truth."

Such a sentiment is echoed by Stephanie Fortune who observes how her students "have a hard time accepting that it's all about money." Fortune also notes that her classes are based almost exclusively in analysis, which may additionally reflect the assumption that teaching media is founded in a delivery of theory – perhaps a further indication of the favouring of more passive classroom relationships. Even Linda Novek, who seems genuinely committed to a notion of the students'

active involvement in the creation of meaning, offers on one occasion a radical though monolithic interpretation of adolescent experience. She recounts an exchange with her class, remembering, “I said, ‘You kids, you can’t even sit still for forty-five minutes’ and I say, ‘But it’s not your fault because your nervous systems are conditioned. You’re psyched, you’re psyched all the time, because you’ve been manipulated by the media’.”

The role of uncertainty

Such certainties or absolutisms lend themselves most readily to a “transmission model” of education that posits a passive student. As Emery asserts, one particularity of media education is its potential to reformulate pedagogy beyond the transmission model, so that “you no longer think about education generally as something that’s transmitted from somebody’s head to another”. The 1982 Council of Europe symposium on “The Secondary School and the Mass Media” thus strikingly declares that media studies fundamentally “implies a recognition of the way that social knowledge - and even our perceptions of reality itself - are constructs, not universal truths.” (20) Such relativism, however, tends to make people - and especially educators - nervous. The discomfort evoked by this uncertainty is acknowledged outright by Stephanie Fortune who claims: “You have to accept that there won’t always be neat little products in the end – which is hard for

teachers because they like completion. Teachers have a very difficult time with that.”

Indeed, Armand and Michele Mattelart, Gregory Ulmer, Giroux and Simon all discuss new paradigms as well as new pedagogies that subsume this important notion of uncertainty, relating it to consent and to issues of reception. The Mattelarts thus propose “postlinearity” or the “paradigm of the fluid”, whereas Ulmer prefers to call the innovation “teletheory” in order to highlight its origins in communication. Ulmer describes teletheory analogously with “previous communications revolutions” (10), noting its subversion of foundationalist assumptions that relate print and alphabetic literacy to the ideology of the autonomous individual, the practice of criticism to the value of objective distance, and “originality” to the notion of intellectual property (4). Giroux and Simon furthermore observe how questions about the construction of reality implicate issues of consent in conjunction with considerations of the role of uncertainty within education.

These questions also suggest a rejection of the pedagogy of modernism, one which serves up “ideal” forms of communication theory in which the tyranny of discourse becomes the ultimate pedagogical medium, that is, talk embodied as a logic disembodied from the body itself. In opposition to the latter position, we need to reemphasize that the issue of consent opens up pedagogy to the uncertain, that space which refuses the measureable, that legitimates the concrete in a way that is felt and experienced rather than merely spoken. (Giroux & Simon 1989: 16)

The study of media, it would seem, therefore depends on a conceptualization of the construction of reality that includes an appreciation for the active role that individuals play in interpreting such fabrications. In the interest of consistency, passive formulations of audiences must be avoided both in terms of engagements with media texts and in terms of positioning within school relations. This implies a recognition of the role of consent and of the centrality of uncertainty in defining educational boundaries. Approaches that overlook or inadequately address such concerns invariably generate conflict and contradiction, as seen in the example of the interviewed group of teachers. Thus, though the assumption of the construction of reality by media engenders various practices, ultimately it is only those that reject absolute formulations of meaning that maintain coherence. David Tripp accordingly asserts that

people, neither adults nor children, simply do not understand or misunderstand something in any absolute sense: they have an understanding that is more or less consonant with their world view at the time. [...] There are no cognitive reasons for not trusting them [children] to come up with an answer that makes sense to them in their world, but there are good personal and social reasons for wanting them to come up with particular answers which will thereby construct a particular kind of world. And because I see the world in a particular kind of way, if we are all going to live together, it helps if their world approximates (or at least intersects with) mine in certain basic respects. (259-260)

The role of production

The efforts to marry different people's constructions of the world also generate multiple approaches to the role of *production* in media education. Production is most strenuously advocated by pragmatists and the pragmatic approach, with its hands-on philosophy, does indeed account for the active meaning-making pupil. Statements by Tiseo, Hughes and Rother, for instance, attest to this interactive teaching style through which students are given license to explore, create and discover according to their own self-determined objectives. Production is emphasized by these teachers because of its ability to ensure that the notion of reality construction becomes actively integrated into students' understandings. "If media education is ultimately about how meanings are constructed and understood, then production work must actively extend students' understanding of the ways those meanings are generated as well as their ability to construct alternatives."

(Grahame 150) Numerous media education theorists in fact stress that some things can only be learned through doing (Buscombe 43; Stafford 73; Grahame 146). Moreover, they note that engagement with media and information technologies "promote an understanding of knowledge as a construction, a product of the interaction of information and the critical questioning of the learner." (Masterman 1997: 5) David Buckingham further relates the importance of production to a focus on the *how* of meaning rather than the *what*.

Nonetheless, hands-on production strategies from a pragmatic perspective also have problems. Noting one of the common concerns that arise from contemplating practical work in schools - namely, the "creativity worry" (Stafford 71) over the potential for student self-indulgence - Buckingham explains that "we cannot merely *validate* the meanings students produce: we must also encourage them to analyse *how* they are produced, and thereby to question them" (1991 [1986]:32). Tiseo's program as well as Hughes' classes seem, at times, to be guilty of such unquestioning creative impulses. For instance, the studio aspect of Tiseo's courses focuses more on the importance of expression and of professionalism than on the implications of production methods beyond aesthetic concerns. Similarly, Hughes is proud to claim that student work is never changed and that one of his main goals is to foster creativity along with the self-esteem that goes with it; he thus evaluates his own performance as a teacher in terms of the products created by the pupils. "If they produce something good then I've done my job," he says. In a sense, this is a matter of not moving from the question 'What does it mean?' to the question 'How does it come to have a meaning?'" (Buckingham 1991 [1986]: 32)

In addition to the issue of creativity, Roy Stafford discusses three other worries that may attend the incorporation of production within media education. There is the possibility of a technicianist obsession with equipment (the 'technicist trap', as Masterman calls it), as well as a

potential tendency toward professional simulation or toward a deconstructionist preoccupation with exercises (71-72). The high level of funding for Tiseo's program is intimately associated with his school's unique commitment to sophisticated and current technologies (including fully equipped photography and television studios, and advanced computer imaging and desktop publishing stations), which places technical concerns at the top of Tiseo's list of priorities. Hughes' focus on the most up-to-date computer graphic technologies in the preparation of CD-Roms is propelled by his conviction that "the future of media is in computers."

Moreover, these teachers as well as Rother avowedly structure their classes according to "business" procedures. Rother's ACE (Alternative Career Education) Program is unsurprisingly job-oriented, with most of the media production occurring under employment-like imperatives. Students therefore *work* at the mediACEenter, which conducts itself like a business, supplying media materials to other schools in the region and repairing broken equipment from those schools. The students are also "hired" out to teachers from throughout the school board in order to videotape events or to help teach other students about media production processes. Tiseo likewise describes, for instance, the accuracy with which his television production course emulates real industry practices. Even Hughes notes that his cooperative, non-teaching approach to his class is inspired by "new-style

business practices” where colleagues work collectively on a common goal. None of these processes is inherently flawed, of course, but they become problematic when industrial modes are assumed unquestioningly. Thus, Stafford reconciles his concerns by advocating an environment that values experimentation and continual renegotiation as long as practices are subject to disciplined evaluation and rigorous criticism - the preconditions for what he calls a “creative curriculum” (75).

Mediated Reality is Best Apprehended by Textual Metaphor

The second assumption states not only that reality is constructed, making meaning a conditionally relative concept, but that meaning is constructed through language, producing “texts”. Texts are not construed as distinct entities from which meaning can be easily and transparently extracted, but rather as the products of symbolic systems such that coherence must be assessed in terms of the relationships in which the texts participate. There exists, then, within holistic approaches to media education, an essential “challenge [to] the notion of the ‘text’ as a self-contained object” (Buckingham 1995: 10); as Buckingham points out, “the boundaries between texts and other texts, and between media, [*and between people and media!*] have become increasingly blurred.” (10)

Texts as signified relationships

Arguments for the interrelational aspect of texts have been contextualized in what Oliver Boyd-Barrett calls the current “period of the critical reader” in media education theory (Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett 180). It is characterized by acknowledgments like that of Len Masterman who in 1985 noted how “Recent research on media audiences has shown that meanings are produced not by texts themselves but by the interaction of texts and audiences.” (30) Boyd-Barrett claims that this period follows one of neo-Marxism (dated 1968-1982) which itself succeeded the reinforcement period surrounding the research of individuals like Hoggart. He lists four factors that account for a renewed insistence on the plurality of meaning: (1) the disenchantment with the class conflict model of society; (2) the expansion of the liberal tradition; (3) the rejection of Marxist totalization; and (4) the collapse of the concept of “dominant ideology” (180-181). However, it is evident that contemporary concerns do not simply reflect a resurrected notion of infinite-possibility-pluralism from the middle of the century which tended to either idealize or ignore relations of power. Rather, current understandings of audience

Recognize that the meaning and politics of particular discourses are not indelibly and transparently written upon the surfaces of a discourse, never innocently available as the result of the production of a particular discourse, nor even by how a text is consciously appropriated by an audience fraction. Interpretations are always struggles to construct

the text and its effects by articulating it into particular relationships. (Grossberg 1989: 93)

Consequently, the meaning constructions of individuals will always be influenced by the discourses, prejudices and resistances available to them as audience members (Morley 1980; Quin & McMahon 1997).

Texts, then, are about relationships: the relationships between semiotic codes as well as those between readers and signs. It is for this reason that David Considine urges educators to think of “media literacy” as the integration of both content and competency (1997: 246).

In addition, meaning as defined by media education is fundamentally a relational concept and it is this relational fluidity that supports a holistic perspective, offering a further sense of coherence to the field. Fluidity is associated with notions of the transferability of textual understandings as much as notions of the polysemy of texts. Masterman specifically ties the idea of “transfer” to the establishment of media education’s coherence (1985: xiii); this is related to concepts of *reading* and *writing*, and to *literacy* as the apprehension of meaning through texts. Conflating the principle of construction with that of meaning’s textual basis, he states that the “first principle of media education from which all else flows, and to which teachers and students will continually return is *that the media are symbolic (or sign) systems which need to be actively read*” (20).

Mattelart and Mattelart also contextualize the interest in textual consumption within the contemporary state of “postlinearity” (Mattelart & Mattelart chapter title), where the “fluid” mode of thought is said to have superseded the “mechanical” (48). The “paradigm of the fluid”, as the authors call it, is credited for having fractured the unitary image of power in society, resulting in “a corresponding plurality of instruments of interpretation.” (57) Such plurality points to the polysemic nature of texts. Thus, the authors stress: “The importance of this break cannot be overstated. It represents without a doubt an advance in our understanding of reality.” (57) Though the authors are talking about communication theory, it is evident that the paradigm of the fluid comes to define new approaches to pedagogy as well, *holistic approaches*, that can allow for ambiguity and the decentralization of authority by redefining literacy in the highlighting of processes rather than things.

The great contribution of the new paradigm of the fluid is precisely to have challenged the smooth and unilateral certainty of the categories and paradigms that had long dominated critical thought. Along with its merit, however, we must point out the ambiguities of the progress thereby made possible. And we must also be quick to recognize that the ambiguity itself has some merit, because it allows us to gain a better grasp of the polysemic character of reality and the actors who embody it. (Mattelart & Mattelart 58)

Literacy and transference

The issues underlying the expanded view of literacy point most significantly to the role of *knowledge transference* in the development of a

literate person. Transference, it must be recalled, underlies a holistic approach to media education by stressing the “transversality” (as mentioned by Mattelart & Mattelart) that ensures an openness to multiplicity, conditionality and integration. Thus, Hobbs emphasizes the ability for “language skills”, as taught by media literacy, to make internal scholastic connections between school subjects (1997: 175). She quotes Shepard: “In fact, media literacy functions so well as an integrator that it would be worth using even if it were not as intrinsically important as it is.” (1997: 177)

This inter-subject integrative capacity is often referred to as the interdisciplinary or cross-curricular aspect of media education / media literacy. It is highlighted by Abigail Anderson Goodman in her recognition that “cultural studies is everything”; and it underscores Mike Hughes’ motivation to integrate media throughout his school environment. The integrative element also appears in Lee Rother’s structuring of his alternative educational program entirely around the “subject” of media. Barry Duncan thus says that media literacy offers a relief from the “hardening of the categories” (1988: 41) In 1973, Murdock and Phelps similarly noted the “challenge to conventional subject divisions” generated by media studies (143). Considine talks about media literacy’s “applications and implications across the traditional and emerging curriculum” (1997: 256), and Lusted refers to new understandings of connections between subject specialisms (3) which

make media studies “genuinely interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary” (7). Cary Bazalgette likewise discusses how media education can come “to underpin everything” a teacher does; “media education cannot be confined to one subject or topic” (Bazalgette 1992: 219).

Again, the centrality of process is key. The observation of Morrison about the discrepancy between “decoding” and “transferring” skills is therefore quite revealing, particularly in relation to problematic approaches to language. She relates the research findings of Quin and McMahon who note the facility with which students semiotically deconstruct texts while showing great difficulty in extending that knowledge to a broader, or even personal, context (103). Judith Williamson (1981) is struck with a comparable realization. She claims that her students could demonstrate the *right* decoding techniques of, say, the issue of violence and sexism in films, “but it meant nothing to *them*, it didn’t *affect* them.” (84) For Williamson’s students, the significance of the decoding process had not penetrated their thinking; and education is therefore reduced to emulation - a process that requires *some* understanding but not the empowering kind that a holistically committed teacher is attempting to induce. It is understanding that is textually specific; it cannot be transferred elsewhere because it is associated with a particular school activity, and only has meaning in that regard. Media educators argue, however, that this is not a picture of

literacy precisely because it excludes any notion of “relevance”; when students are simply doing the exercises and can find no answer that satisfies them to the question *Why should we do this?*, then the education for literacy has failed (Masterman 1985: 19).

Problems with the reification of text

Relevance here is a useful concept in evaluating the difference between holistic and pragmatic approaches to media education as they deal with issues of textual relationships. Holistically-minded teachers emphasize that relevance must be understood in terms of the ability to *make* something relevant; it is a construct, just like everything else, and it is *produced with* literacy rather than the precursor of it. This explains why so many teachers have turned to media literacy, saying that they are responding to a “search for relevance”; relevance is implicit in any education for literacy. It is also why Duncan declares that “for many young people media literacy discussions may be the only relevant critical thinking exchanges they receive in their education.” (1992: 14) However, such exchanges are not relevant because they are popular or because they are appealing, despite the fact that these elements play a part. They are relevant because they allow new ideas, perspectives, and abilities to become incorporated into the students’ repertoires of knowledge such that *all* further thinking is affected and new relationships can be perceived.

Pragmatists tend nonetheless to have a narrow view that equates popularity with relevance as though some things were *inherently* relevant. Like Barry Duncan, they seem to presume that the addressing of media in the classroom itself ensures the expansion of thought, which is clearly not the case as the testimony of Williamson suggests. There is, furthermore, the dangerous notion accompanying such a presumption that relevance precedes education rather than emerges in relationship with it. This inadequate notion encourages practices that are guilty of the common charge leveled against media education: it does not take students to any place to which they had not already been. One must therefore exercise caution with suggestions like those offered, for instance, by Hughes and Tiseo, which justify media education in terms of its relevancy, currency, or entertainment value. For, relevancy may be too simplistically defined, with the result being a politically disengaged appeal to flashiness and “fun”. Hughes tellingly states that the major difference between his teaching and that done at higher levels of schooling can be summarized by the need to “entertain” high school students. Novek likewise concludes that she possesses an ideal personality quality to be a media teacher: “That’s the quality I have,” she says, “it’s that I’m an entertainer.” Also, Corcos accordingly observes, “I’ve got to try to make the class a little bit flashy”.

Novek and Corcos do not simply rely opportunistically on the fun quotient of media. They also, along with some of their colleagues, display

sometimes moralistic and sometimes radical assumptions about “text”. These assumptions contravene the ideas of fluidity, transference and polysemy found in more holistic approaches, even though general agreement is still maintained about the importance of text as linguistically emergent objects of study. Thus, Corcos complains that kids today “spend their lives in front of the TV set and the movie screen. Which in itself is okay if the material is good.” Yet he suggests that the material is not good. He says, “The problem, I think, with television is that it ran out of ideas a long time ago. And right now all it’s doing is it’s bringing back the old ideas and most of the ideas that are negative sell.” Interestingly, Corcos also seems to contradict himself on the value of those “old ideas” since he later characterizes television of the past in terms of a golden era. He therefore further expresses his disapproval of TV, declaring, “Ironically, I can’t stand television, because I’m furious at what it’s doing if I compare it to TV of the 60s and 70s and before that. Additionally, Corcos reveals his assumptions about the disjunction between individuals and texts when he discusses what the media do *to* people, as though media texts were externally imposed. He notes, for example, that some of his students “have a very good sense, even at 13 and 14 years old and 15, of what the media is doing to them.” His teaching technique as he describes it consequently seems to most often follow a transmission model.

Indeed, Corcos' position compels further consideration of some of Masterman's criticisms of moralistic media education. He offers six challenges, among which points 2 through 5 are directly pertinent to Corcos' approach. Masterman therefore accuses moralism on the following grounds.

2. There are no widely agreed upon criteria for evaluating the media.
 3. The appropriateness of applying aesthetic criteria to much media output remains doubtful.
 4. Despite its laudable sensitivity to questions of value, the discriminatory approach has "posited a *naïvely transcendental notion of value*", leaving unquestioned "*the social and ideological bases of particular interpretations and judgements* and the assumptions and criteria underpinning assertions of value."
 5. Since value is understood as inherent to the text, the subject of study becomes media texts at the exclusion of the contexts in which texts are produced, distributed and consumed.
- (Masterman 1985: 59-60)

Points 4 and 5 reflect the politically limiting aspects of the moralistic approach to media education. Perhaps most damaging is the rigid conceptualization of value in absolute terms, which prevents any consideration of the multiplicity or evolution of meaning and of the way meaning may be harnessed toward particular ends. Such a perspective obscures the conditionality of assumptions and interpretations, and it consequently renders people powerless to address, question and alter those conditions. This kind of political paralysis is further aggravated by the natural choice of subject matter consonant with this approach. The emphasis on the text extracts meaning from its social nexus, looks at

ideas in purist, ahistorical terms, and ultimately encourages the disjunction between thought and action.

Points 2 and 3 deal conjointly with the still prevalent uncertainties about communication, its processes and its role within the culture. The arguments serve as reminders that the intellectual community has only begun to explore the media and their implications in the context of “communication”. The arguments also stress the untenability of a moralistic approach that is unsure of its own standard.

Novek is less contemptuous of media texts but she still at times demonstrates a reifying predilection to view text as distinct, external objects with inherent qualities. She discusses, with certainty, what various movie texts *mean* in terms of traditional narrative; and she observes media influences as externally imposed. Novek says, “You know, we’re so manipulated by the media. I want them to understand the ways in which they’re being manipulated”. Wilson comparably emphasizes the hurtful impact that portrayals of body image seem to *impose* on teens, and Lukes explains how she stresses to her students that “every message has a purpose”. These perspectives reflect more radical leanings and the corresponding peculiarity of subject matter; radical educators tend to focus on texts OR contexts, but rarely both. This can be explained by the fact that, for radicals, ideology is tied to specific *things*. Ideology is seen as the product of a language, or an economy, or an industrial structure, or a political system, etc. It is not

the product of the processes of human meaning construction entailed by these things, but actually of the things themselves. This is why demystification is so important.

Demystification highlights the question of what media products are *really* communicating. There is a drive within the radical approach to get to the “truth” about communication. So teachers, being only human, come to settle on a satisfying unitary truth which, in the end, must either be seen as embedded in the text itself or in the material conditions of its existence (i.e. context), but which is more difficultly attributed to an ambiguous “somewhere” in the middle. There is no ambiguity to the radical truth. Certainly, radical educators sometimes pay lip-service to notions of polysemy and meaning negotiation but the significance of such ideas is undercut by the steadfast interest in revealing, for instance, the extent of oppression *inherent* to particular media representations or practices. To greater or lesser extents, teachers like Novek, Lukes, and Wilson therefore demonstrate such radical tendencies to *demystify*. Stephanie Fortune’s insistence on deconstructive practices is another example of such an objective. She proclaims about her students, “They’re used to wanting to produce flashy constructions. I want them to *deconstruct*.” Fortune’s emphasis on analytical exercises is derived from this radical position.

Social language, social textuality

Indeed, one notices that the drive toward demystification is propelled by a concern with social/political implications. However, social issues and their relationship with text can be variously understood. This discrepancy is another source of discordant teaching practices; and it seems to come from the fact that “language” has two levels of significance – the local and the social – which causes considerable confusion for media educators.

Since the assumption that mediated reality is a human fabrication called “text” engenders an exploration of issues of *literacy*, the concept of “language” has also fallen under scrutiny. “*Language* is one of the several concepts which have been developed precisely for this purpose of explaining and exploring what is general to a range of media whilst remaining sensitive to what is specific to any medium, focusing on differences between them as well as on their similarities.” (Lusted 7)

However, this description of the relevance of “language” may lead one to view it strictly as a characteristic of media texts rather than as a *process*. Thus, the semiotic, or the *local*, level of language gets highlighted at the expense of the social. In explaining semiology, Manzi and Rowe maintain that it is based on the assumption that meaning “arises from a particular combination of signs and their place in a language *system*.” (41)

Although they are justified in observing the way semiology can align textual and social analyses, they fail to mention the extent to which

semiotic categories often get reified as designators of indisputable meaning while discounting the role of the reader and of social factors generally. Jim Cook observes that a focus on reading “conventions” tends to be preoccupied with *text*, where text is defined in essentialist terms (161).

Cook details the five “codes of intelligibility” as theorized by Barthes, and Bazalgette similarly presents some semiotic categories in her discussion of “Language” as one of the “key aspects of media education.” (1992: 213) She argues that media have distinct “languages” which must be learned before people can make meanings from them, and she points, for instance, to the “codes” and “conventions” that require familiarity for understanding to occur (211-214). The problem with Bazalgette’s proposition is not that codes do not exist but rather that she, like the more radical educators among the interviewees, suggests that these are inherent to text-objects. This view ignores the social levels of language upon which such codes are equally contingent, and it accordingly prevents a processual understanding of the concept. Bazalgette offers “Audience” as another key aspect which injects social factors into the notion of media education, but this does not rescue language from its objectified categorization. A similar problem can be observed in Hobbs’ separation of the media literacy skills of “analysis” and “evaluation” where analysis is seen as impersonal while evaluation implicates “the students’ existing world view, knowledge, attitudes, and

values" (1997: 167); she comparably ignores the fact that analysis *is* evaluative, and evaluation *is* analytic.

A holistic approach to media education avoids such false distinctions by conceptualizing language on both levels simultaneously. This is what is meant by Alvarado's insistence that even if we recognize a dominant mode of representation, it "does not mean that there is only one way of decoding or reading" (1992 (1983): 96). Indeed, even the determination of "dominant" or "alternative" readings depends upon the interaction of social and textual engagements with language. Manzi and Rowe relate such conditionality to the notion of "work", returning language to the process that it is. They state that

meaning resides neither in the intention of the producer of an artefact nor in the formal composition of the artefact but, rather, from the *work* done by the reader to make sense of both. Meaning depends on the cultural understanding and the emotions of the reader which are themselves a product of the society - with its particular history, culture and values - within which the signs are produced and the reader reads. (42-43)

"Language" permeates the entire curriculum and, in that sense, it is a cohering concept. Proponents of media education have observed the integrative potential of such ideas as "media literacy" on a number of levels. Buckingham claims, for instance, that the concept's focus on meaning in terms of "language" highlights the social aspects of knowledge ("social modes of thinking"), enabling people "to move [] beyond the dualistic opposition between the individual and the social

that has often characterised educational debate.” (1995: 209) Education can therefore be released from the paralyzing dualism between structure and agency, which conceives of the individual as either helplessly positioned by language or else as a free user of it. (Buckingham 1995: 209) In an earlier telling piece, however, Buckingham points out that the understanding of knowledge as constituted through symbolic systems and discursive practices is not something peculiar to media studies (1992 (1987): 105). He thus stresses that media literacy (or media education) is an integrative perspective more than a delineation of broadly compelling subject matter.

CHAPTER 6

QUEBEC MEDIA EDUCATORS' APPROACHES AND ASSUMPTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIA EDUCATION THEORY Part 2

The assumptive similarities among the group of interviewed teachers nevertheless engender discrepant pedagogical approaches. This is evidenced in the previous discussion of practices attending to notions of media's construction of reality and to assumptions about meaning's textuality. This chapter continues such an argument by tracing the pedagogical inconsistencies associated with two other areas of philosophical agreement: the epistemological conceptualization of the learning subject, and the ethical formulation of education's social value. Thus, divergences can be observed from within the assumption that what one *already* knows determines what one *can* know, as from within the assumption that the development of critical independence constitutes education's primary social value.

What One Already Knows Determines What One Can Know

The interviewees all accede to the assumption that prior knowledge and experiences are important determinants of learning, yet they also express different attitudes toward students' knowledge repertoires. Some view the prior knowledge as "baggage", a hindrance that must be overcome. Some embrace it and even celebrate it. Some are more

ambivalent. In each case, different teaching practices emerge, bolstered by these varying assumptions about the *value* of influences beyond the immediate scholastic environment.

Holistic media educators always begin by legitimizing students' lived experiences such that the resistance that may arise from the pupils' sense of a usurpation of their private culture is minimized. As Grossberg asserts, "first we must allow ourselves to be educated by those we are attempting to understand, by the cultural forms they enjoy, and by the practices they engage with. We must learn how to listen to them if we expect them to listen to us." (114) Proponents often refer to this movement in terms of the educational exploration of "everyday life" (Giroux & Simon 221). Quin and McMahon therefore relate media literacy's overriding concern with the currency of experience to a demand for "strategies that are relevant to the everyday" (318). They support Grossberg's contention by insisting that "We need to pay attention to what students are bringing to the text and acknowledge that their readings of a program may be very different from our own but equally valid." (317) Buckingham complements the argument by observing that, as teachers, "we need to understand more about what our students *already* know before we start trying to teach them what we think they ought to know." (1991 [1986]: 30) In a later piece, however, he and colleagues observe that media educators still self-defeatingly tend to neglect the first concern in favour of the latter (Buckingham et al. 202).

Preferences and Pleasures

Such instances are noted by Masterman as well, and he criticizes those media educators who are “largely contemptuous of, and bent upon ‘improving’ the tastes of students” (1985: 59). Masterman claims that such moralistic perspectives lead to “discriminatory approaches to the media” that result in “essentially negative exercises” (59). Corcos provides a good example with statements like: “I can’t stand television”, “today’s kids are selfish”, “[t]here’s an attitude that’s got to change in today’s children”, and “it’s not that easy or obvious to make them believe or accept that their favourite show has problems.” Brandeis in fact pointedly relates a story by way of warning. She says, “I came across a few teachers who jumped on the bandwagon because they hated the media. And they thought that this would be a great opportunity to teach their kids how bad the media was, and to condemn it rather than condone it, and to protect their kids from the media. You have to be real careful of that too.” Brandeis’ cautionary anecdote recounts how certain teachers cleverly pretend to embrace popular texts within the educational setting as a covert way of leading students from those base pleasures to “higher things”. Hall and Whannel assert, however, that such an opportunist is “as frequently unsympathetic to the really valuable qualities of popular culture as his colleague who remains resolutely hostile. In neither case is there a genuine response, nor any basis for real judgments.” (25) They add that “[y]oung people are

especially sensitive to the insincerity that is often at the root of such opportunism.” (25)

Indeed, far from the contempt of moralistic approaches, a holistic approach proposes that meaning and pleasure are inseparable. This is another possibility derived from the assumption of prior knowledge that facilitates the development of new and more complex relationships: media education does not expel pleasure from the school experience but, rather, embraces it as a fundamental component of students’ prior and future meanings. Such a perspective accounts, in part, for the standard observation that students *enjoy* media study. Buscombe thus explains that, contrary to the view that media classes are popular because they entail no work and no learning, it is precisely because work and learning *do occur* that the courses are found to be so appealing (43). Pleasure is integrated into media education’s holistic reconceptualization of learning and it is therefore not surprising that such education is experienced as *pleasurable*. Masterman also adds that the pleasure component tends to encourage more negotiation between students and teachers, since the “ideal in media education should be to seek not the destruction of pleasure but its expansion into new and different forms of enjoyment.” (1985: 239) Negotiation is further suggested by the sensitivity required of the task of encouraging students to “problematise and reflect more deeply upon their pleasures” (Masterman 1985: 239).

It is important to recognize, however, that the validation of student understanding and pleasure does not necessarily mean that knowledge is left where it was or that an infinite plurality of meanings are equally legitimate. It does suggest, though, that the teaching process becomes more open. This means that *differences* are readily acknowledged and questioned, particularly in relation to seeing different forms of prior knowledge as available to different groups in society (Buckingham 1991 (1986): 31); it also means that student-centredness is not incompatible with purposeful instruction or structured activity (Buckingham et al 103). Difference, as discussed by Buckingham, is stressed by Giroux and Simon as well, who claim that it “implies a struggle over assigned meaning” which is the basis of pedagogy; “This is a struggle that can never be won,” they add, “or pedagogy stops.” (23)

Beginning with kids’ experiences and struggles over meaning thus implies a greater relativity in pedagogical practices. The Council of Europe’s symposium on “The Secondary School and the Mass Media” accordingly proposes:

Rather than rely upon a structured body of knowledge to be transmitted, the school should consider the young in their socio-cultural environment, as the subjects of every kind of learning. As regards the media, in other words, it would be better, instead of passing on knowledge about them to start with pupils’ interest in one or another medium as they ordinarily use it” (29)

Quin and McMahon concur, noting that “there is no fixed body of knowledge which constitutes media education.” (311) Likewise, Ben

Moore compares media education to the study of English, where neither specify their content (173), and Duncan frequently refers to material of media studies as a “moveable text”.

Teachers like Sargisson, Novek, and Fortune therefore stress the vast extent of the variety that a media class entails in its “subject”. Sargisson states, “The neatest thing about teaching the media is that there’s just so much you can do.” Novek observes how she is perpetually updating the material, “forever taping TV shows and reading magazines and getting involved”, and sometimes feeling overwhelmed because “there’s no way I can keep up with popular culture and what’s going on”. Fortune similarly remarks, “It’s such a huge subject. [...] There’s so much, and it’s changing constantly.”

Self-awareness: examining one’s past

Media educators further recognize that the forging of new relationships cannot be accomplished unless students gain an *awareness* of the relationships on which they already depend. Consequently, an emphasis on reflection comes to be seen as central to the pleasures in prior experiences as well as to prior meanings generally. The concern is based on the premise that much of people’s knowledge is guided by *implicit* connections; holistic media education seeks to make such connections *explicit*. It is an invaluable undertaking because it is this training toward relational awareness of one’s own engagement with

meaning that enables people to continue active learning and personal growth beyond the walls of the classroom and long after they have passed their stages of formal schooling. Only by reflecting on one's constructions of meaning is it possible to generalize from immediate experiences to future ones (Buckingham et al. 211) Moore calls this an encouragement toward self-consciousness such that students learn to question themselves about "*how* they know what they know." (173)

[I]t is not enough for students simply to 'learn the language' - to learn to 'write' in the modern media. They must also learn to reflect upon the process of writing itself. They must come to understand the ways in which meanings and pleasures are made, and the ways in which language both constrains and creates the possibilities for social communication. (Buckingham et al. 223)

These authors also point out that such an emphasis on reflection can have profound pedagogical implications, particularly as it relates to the importance of self-evaluation within the structures of assessment in schools. Indeed, they argue that evaluation depends upon sharing ideas, making mistakes, changing one's mind, while assessment, as the process of "grade" allocation, is understood quite differently; "assessment can prove incompatible with effective evaluation, and [] it may even actively prevent it." (Buckingham et al. 163) The authors therefore advocate the inclusion of class activities that can be extensively evaluated (self-evaluated!) without being assessed in the interest of not squandering important opportunities for learning (167). Tiseo's dispensation with formal tests in favour of a regiment of "quizzes" may represent such an

evaluative process. Wilson additionally suggests that “hopefully you’re not teaching to test”. However, Corcos appears to be less concerned about the reflective aspect of evaluation. He claims, “You have to sit and watch them watch, that’s the funniest thing. Some of them are going to just look and it’s like: *What is this about?* Because, well, being a high school, you have to give work.”

Student validation and the leveling of hierarchies

The centrality of prior knowledge combined with the student negotiations of pleasures and meanings as well as the insistence on evaluative reflection ensures that the relationship between teacher and student can no longer be one of traditional authority. The relativism implied by the focus on lived experience breaks down the hierarchies that have typically defined institutionalized education, especially the hierarchy between “expert” and pupil. Furthermore, the stress on the “real world” forces the collapsing of distinctions between the properly “educational” and the “non-educational” such that the gap between classroom and environment is bridged “by making practical links between schools and out-of-school educational influences” (Masterman 1985: 63).

Such an integrative perspective is further revealed in media education’s potential for overcoming traditional separations between work, leisure, and culture, thereby addressing the links between

education and the living environment. Sholle and Denski note the redefinition of work that media education permits; it is a redefinition that posits education neither as a simple end in itself, nor as an instrumental market appendage, but as both and neither (106). Others have comparably pointed to the “general attempt to create links between the school and the surrounding community” (Murdock & Phelps 143) that media education represents. Hobbs observes how media literacy can effectively counteract the “failure” that occurs in schools as a result of disenchantment. This may be achieved, she suggests, by virtue of media literacy’s re-drawing of the connections between the school and the community (165). Hobbs is supported by Lorraine Page who also advocates media education as a corrective to dichotomous relations between education and the culture that have perpetuated a disinterest in schooling among young people. She wonders: “Le décrochage scolaire, un phenomene que l’on retrouve dans tous les pays developpes, serait-il associe a l’incapacite chronique de l’ecole a integrer la culture moderne de la societe des communications? (The disinterest in schooling, a phenomenon we observe in all of the developed countries, could it not be associated with the school’s chronic incapacity to integrate the modern culture of a communications society?) (6)

Non-hierarchical pedagogies are therefore said to accompany these integrative aspects of holistic approaches to media education.

Masterman consequently argues that “teaching effectively about the

media *demand*s non-hierarchical teaching modes and a methodology which will promote reflection and critical thinking" (1985: 27). Emery echoes the sentiment with his proposition that "you have to develop a non-hierarchical style of teaching". This implies that media education avoids content distinctions between, for instance, "high" and "low" culture (media education curriculum guidelines, Scotland, 2). More importantly, though, it implies that the teacher is forced to be an equal participant in the class rather than an "accredited expert" who stands in the front and dictates ideas as well as procedures.

The pedagogical model is therefore an interactive one, and the relationship between teacher and pupil is significantly altered from the transmission model where the teacher is the all-knowing center of learning. In the interactive model, the student is seen more as an apprentice than as an unknowing attendee; crucially, she or he is expected to actively pursue her/his own learning. In addition to the change in students' positioning, the teacher also undergoes a role transformation. The notion of the teacher as an "irreplaceable transmitter" of knowledge is often said to be no longer viable in contemporary society - "[t]oday, the teacher can no longer take shelter behind what may be termed 'the authority of learning'" (Gambiez 15) - and it is certainly inadequate in the context of teaching media. "In working with the media it is crucial that the model of teachers providing the knowledge for their pupils is adjusted." (Bowker 228) Such

inadequacy arises primarily from the communicational principles of media education; as an example, it is very difficult to induce a sense of the individual's role in the constructedness of reality if the teacher attempts to feed the students pre-constructed ideas. This is why Buscombe asserts that the practical component essential to media education as conveyer of "construction" makes it much more difficult to reproduce authoritarian relationships of pre-defined meanings (43). In this sense, the teacher's perceptions and interpretations are as open to investigation and change as everyone else's. The holistic practice of media education, then, is one in which all participants share what they think and question why they think as they do." (Masterman 1985: 29)

This kind of media education thus attempts to re-balance the opportunities for communication between teachers and students. Such an approach slackens the rigid structures of school power, generating the possibility for a more democratic style of participation and for greater fluidity between the classroom and the world. It opens the door, too, to a potential for heightened scrutiny not only of communication processes in media texts but also, significantly, of those in the classroom. As James Donald notes, such efforts "may reveal some contradictions both in the school and in the course." (81) Participants in schooling are encouraged to explore these contradictions, and both teacher and student authority is thus altered as the educational environment is transformed. It is indeed implicit in the holistic approach to media education that

“teaching about the media proposes a different relation between the teacher/the taught/the subject from that of knowing teacher/empty vessel student/neutral knowledge” (Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett 55) which inevitably disrupts traditional hierarchies.

However, different teachers are more or less comfortable with this refiguration of teacher-student hierarchies. Fortune and Hughes, for instance, each comment specifically on the difficulties educators have with such issues of control. Fortune says it makes media teaching “messy”, and Hughes notes the resistance of some of his colleagues in terms of a “problem of control”. Indeed, the degree to which the interviewees are willing to relinquish traditional markers of control in the name of validating student knowledge seems to account for some of the major differences between their teaching styles. Thus, some teachers stress that “when you teach media, you have to accept that you are not necessarily the expert” (Lukes) and they feel comfortable “giving them [them students] the opportunity [to experiment] and facilitating and coaching what they’re doing.” (Sargisson) They emphasize the importance of allowing pupils to determine their own objectives (Hughes; Rother; Tiseo; Emery), and they even express excitement in accepting that the “students have so much more to bring to the table, much more than any other kind of class.” (Novek) Yet, others lament the apparently discouraging fact that students “have their own vision of it [the media]. [And] they will get into an argument with me.” (Corcos) Some, like

Fortune, are more ambivalent. She claims, for instance, to be “more apt to hand them [the students] the ball. Because they know so much about media”. But she also acknowledges the struggle in coping with such undefined, “messy” circumstances.

One may note a connection between production-oriented pedagogies and teacher willingness to abandon traditional hierarchical relations. While radically- or moralistically-minded teachers differ in their views toward teacher authority, the educators with pragmatic tendencies seem to agree in their openness to new scholastic relationships. In fact, media education theorists have frequently observed the substantial role that practical work can play in the redistribution of classroom power. It should be mentioned, however, that not all media educators are staunch supporters of extensive practical activity; nonetheless, holistic approaches require significant opportunities for production as analogies for reality construction and as devices for personalizing learning. Control is inevitably relinquished within such pedagogies. Buckingham, Grahame and Sefton-Green remark:

Compared with the safety of critical analysis, practical work is bound to be much less controllable. It is here that teachers have to hand over the ‘means of production’ to their students, and to live with the consequences. As we have indicated, media educators’ reluctance to cede this control has led to a widespread suspicion of practical work, and to prescriptions for classroom practice that are often highly reductive. In the process, a series of fundamental theoretical oppositions have been invoked which are profoundly

problematic - oppositions between theory and practice, between rationality and emotion, between objectivity and subjectivity, between the cognitive and the experiential. (201)

They thus explain how practical work and its attendant relinquishing of control support holism by integrating rather than perpetuating the problematic dichotomies to which they refer.

The “consequences” mentioned can be a source of anxiety for teachers since the authors acknowledge the extent to which practical work can become a “site for ‘carnival’” in which “official” discourses may be subverted or transgressed (222). The reference to carnival is somewhat apt in the context of students’ newfound power for it alludes to a time of suspended rules; interestingly, carnival also implies a state in which conventions may be overturned although that state is only meaningful to the extent that traditional conventions are still maintained. The comparison between student production and carnival therefore evokes questions about how much power students do, can, or should have. It is nevertheless unquestionable that certain aspects of practical work open up channels to which students never (or rarely) previously had access. One such opportunity is the venue for peer-audience production that is rarely explored in schools. Even drama, which may be the only other scholastic area where production is aimed specifically at a peer audience, rarely elicits the kind of student control over the work that video, photography, or even print texts permit. Such sanctioned freedom to address one’s peers amounts to a significant

subversion of the authoritative school relationship in which communication is highly monitored and regulated.

Critical Independence is the Main Social Value (for Education)

The fourth set of assumptions uncovers the interviewees' interest in developing critical independence as their primary educative goal. Critical independence is alternately construed as "freedom", the "ability to perceive choices", and "empowerment". These concepts are, however, also complex; and the various interpretations of their meanings engender further discrepancies of pedagogical practice. Thus one may note that empowerment or freedom can be meaningful on a number of levels; and they are sometimes used to describe what may be profoundly oppressive practices, particularly where education is concerned. Empowerment can be understood on relatively superficial levels: it may be the result of a technical skill that facilitates employment. But when media education advocates speak of empowerment, they are more often referring to a state that extends well beyond such levels, although they are quick not to negate the value of technical skill. Those following a holistic approach are, for instance, referring to a personal freedom that is aware of its social connections, lives in comfortable ambiguity, and self-consciously expresses itself through social forces. It is an empowerment that derives from a critical pedagogy which "represents a partisan project linking the purpose of schooling to a transformative vision of the future." (Sholle &

Denski 23) It is, indeed, a notion of empowerment consonant with democratic values that embody the best of what educational theory has envisioned for the schools.

Schools are thus proffered as “places of critical education in the service of creating a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise power over their own lives, and especially over the conditions of knowledge production and acquisition.” (Freire & Giroux viii) The objective of schooling is therefore ultimately the personalization of those aspects of society that can seem personally inconsequential so that alternative visions can be opened up; “[f]or at the heart of praxis is that moment when the human subject truly believes that he or she can begin to make history.” (Giroux 1981: 32) It is argued, then, that the type of education that most closely approximates this ideal is a *media* education, an education that focuses on conditions and processes rather than absolute ideas. “The more I have taught in further education, the more I think it hardly matters, in a way, *what* you teach, as long as it leads to this questioning, which itself is a prerequisite for social change....” (Williamson 83)

Social positioning and the articulation of power

An important premise that accompanies the assumption of critical independence observes the necessity for recognizing the fundamental relationship between knowledge and power (Buckingham 1991 [1986]:

30) in which media (and media education) participate. This is the relationship that determines the constraints and the political implications of meanings, ensuring that not all understandings are possible and not all are equally valid. Assumptions about the value of critical independence are, furthermore, what enable education to contribute to political action by focusing on the significance of meaning in both social and personal terms. Indeed, Buckingham's summary of a section he calls "making meaning" incorporates the four assumptions (ie. media construct reality, meaning is textually apprehended, prior knowledge determines learning, and critical independence is valued) expressed by the interviewees, culminating in an explanation of the fourth's concern with politics. He writes:

meaning cannot be seen as something which is contained within the text, and which has been placed there by the author. Rather, it is **readers who actively produce meaning** by drawing on their **prior knowledge**, which is itself derived both from their **social experience** and from their **experience of other texts**. Although this knowledge will be different for different readers, it is **socially produced**, and will tend in certain crucial ways to be shared. [boldface added] (1991 (1986): 26)

His observation of the social production of meaning draws attention to the fact that the people who are constructing their worlds do not live in a vacuum; social forces of power thus limit to a finite number the breadth of experiences to which any person has access. This is akin to Ellsworth's statement that "[n]ot all versions of reality enjoy equal legitimacy within a given historical moment. Not all negotiators of

meaning get a fair hearing. Not all negotiators have access to powerful negotiation skills or repertoires of discourse.” (62) Thus, media education that adopts a holistic approach must be perpetually sensitive to such limitations so that the pedagogy does not become one of total relativism.

It is not sufficient, then, to facilitate and subsequently celebrate students’ expressions of their own experiences because this leads to what Paul Smith refers to as “cultural quietism”: the assumption that one person’s understanding of a text is as sufficient as the next person’s (Smith 34). And in such a situation, there is nothing to be done; all action becomes futile; power becomes inconsequential; critical independence becomes moot. Grossberg similarly cautions against a “postmodern” description of youth culture that can mislead educators to empty the concept of “power” of its potency. He chides the attitude that it’s “not that youths do not feel alienated but that they do not make sense of their alienation in ideological terms; not that traditional moral and political categories are wrong but that they are simply inapplicable.” (101) Again, he observes, the inevitable outcome is conservative inaction.

This is not, however, the necessary result of student-centred media education, for, as several educators have maintained, one of the main goals in facilitating students’ expression of their experiences is “to make students aware that they do have positions”, to encourage them “to

recognize the politics of their own position.” (Quin & McMahon 312-313)

Pupils do not have to be told what their position is in order to come to an understanding that positions do exist and that they themselves are articulated through them. Thus, when educators speak of “making the invisible visible”, they are propelled by a concern to raise student awareness of the ideological implications of their meanings. It is also in this light that the emphasis on reflection and self-evaluation as mentioned under the third assumption becomes additionally important.

The “power” of schooling

Considerations of power and politics are not merely necessary within the evaluation of students’ understandings. These are equally significant in addressing the process of schooling itself, and media education, as supportive of a communication perspective, insists that the medium by which meanings are constructed is as central as the meanings themselves. In this case, pedagogical practices constitute the medium. The pedagogical and the political are therefore intertwined. The relationship is evidenced, for instance, in the ideological workings within classroom dynamics; and the principle of the political nature of meaning demands that teachers be equally sensitive to the manifestations of power in the class. The point is poignantly made through Buckingham’s and colleagues’ observations of different modes of participation between boys and girls engaged in media production and

analysis. It is observed that reading competencies are, for instance, not universal but socially distributed, and that the girls and boys in the study tended to have gendered tastes and preferences just as they displayed different uses of media for different purposes. The authors conclude that teachers must be aware of the possibility of “gendering” the curriculum through their own assumptions, and that the ultimate question to ask is how *different* knowledge and orientations can be built upon through multiple perspectives without essentializing the approaches. This emphasizes the fact that not only are students required to question and problematize their assumptions, but teachers must do it too.

Assumptions about critical independence further lead to propositions about the possibility for student “deconstruction” of schooling, which is sometimes viewed as an educational triumph and sometimes as a necessary evil. Alvarado and Boyd-Barrett summarize Buckingham’s position in alignment with the former view, noting how, for him, the “most valuable asset of media study [] is its generation of a questioning, problematising approach to media, one that is applicable both to the study of media and to the study of knowledge (and hence of education).” (93) However, the Council of Europe is less enthusiastic. They retort:

But, by thus accustoming the young not to accept everything unthinkingly and giving them the means of checking the truth - the facts - of the information presented to them, we

do run the undoubted risk that they will extend their criticism to our educational systems, institutions and society as a whole. [...] Once it [criticism] become the general rule it either produces the kind of happenings experienced throughout Europe and the United States in 1968, or else ends in a degree of destabilisation and anarchy which governments can no longer control. (Gambiez 40)

The language of the Council sounds unnecessarily paranoid, and yet one might argue that there already is significant destabilization in the culture. Furthermore, the simplistic notion that programs could suddenly reveal the real “truth” through revelations of “facts” never before available eliminates the bulk of the radical potential that a critical pedagogy could have had. In any case, the fear of a lapse into uncontrollable anarchy as a result of critically-oriented education seems highly unwarranted; however, it also interestingly reveals the extent to which educators feel that the educational system and indeed the society in general could not stand up to scrutiny.

It must be added, too, that such an effort as potentially represented by media education is unlikely to produce the chaos of which the report of the Council of Europe is wary (Gambiez 40). Chaos means purposeless incoherence, and while disruption usually precedes change, the kind of questions posed by media education are always contextualized and they are always purposeful. The political impetus of media education ensures that deconstruction is never conducted for the mere sake of blowing apart conventions; such deconstructive activity,

within a holistic approach to media education, is perennially aware of its political implications.

It may be said, then, that there is an “interference of politics in the systems and structures through which and in which learning is produced and acquired”; and this interference defines what is and is not possible (Sholle & Denski 4). Giroux and Simon accordingly present three principles through which the interrelationship between pedagogy and politics in its relevance to the field of popular culture may be articulated. First, in accordance with the previous discussion of pleasure, they insist that pleasure be included with meaning as a component of struggle. Second, they declare that “the idea and experience of pleasure must be constituted politically” so that it provides “an important corporeal condition of life-affirming possibility”. Finally, they add that popular culture must be understood as “a field of possibilities within which students can be empowered” (Giroux & Simon 18). These principles function as pedagogical guides toward the politicization of media *teaching*, advocating the kind of “cultural studies” approach called for by Duncan in the place of the commonly practiced depoliticized “literary approach” (Duncan 1992: 13)

Depoliticization

Depoliticization can result from a number of practices that conceptualize critical independence apart from the interplay of self-

consciousness and social relationships. For instance, moralistic approaches associate critical independence with aesthetic evaluations. By situating this “freedom” within the realm of aesthetics, it is not only divorced from political action but it must also succumb to the much more confining rules of current aesthetic judgments. Thus, teaching practices based on these assumptions can be highly structured, hierarchical, and transmission-oriented. Such a pedagogy is somewhat reflected in the attitudes of Corcos and Wilson; they are committed to what Masterman calls the “teaching of discrimination” which he claims “is increasingly impracticable.” (1985: 60) The problem is that such methodologies overlook the role of the individual in the process of learning, illustrating the primary failure of all transmission models of meaning. They presume that a society’s central task is simply to determine its base of values and ideas - as if they formed one coherent whole - since these can subsequently be unproblematically poured into the empty mind-vessels of the young novitiates. Pedagogical theory therefore becomes bogged down by content disputes as the educational system strives to be as comprehensive as possible in its delivery of the “right” ideas.

Unfortunately, this delivery of the right ideas has proved to be far more problematic than the model anticipates, as Masterman suggests. The teaching practices encouraged by the Leavisite approach are not only ineffective, particularly within the “multi-ethnic, predominantly working-

class, mixed ability comprehensive school classroom”, but they are often offensively counter-productive, “turning one child in every five into a ‘slow learner’ and linking print indissolubly with failure.” (Masterman 1985: 60-61) These practices also consequently removed students from the possibility of expanding opportunities for action.

There, there were no comfortable closed circles of agreed meaning - or if there were they were far from congruent with Leavisite sympathies. And the minoritarianism of Leavisism - the anti-democratic spirit of a project which left, *by definition*, the responses of majorities out of the account - was finally understood by many teachers to be not only unworkable, but unworthy.” (Masterman 1985: 61)

Such disturbing depoliticization occurs as a result of pragmatic approaches as well, since these can be swept away by the lure of professionalism. Of course, utilitarian or career incentives in education are not to be categorically disparaged. Many teachers have frustratedly insisted that not only has education in modern society *always* been deeply integrated into labour practices (Quin 1994) but that academically elitist condemnations of vocationalism have merely served to perpetuate false distinctions among “knowledge classes”. The recognition of school’s utilitarian purpose from a pragmatic perspective is no more unjustified than the concern for values and tastes among moralists. What is problematic, however, is what is typically absent in educational projects guided by these approaches.

The pragmatists’ interest in relevance ensures that they place great importance on responding to the world *as it is*. In so doing, they take

“what is” as gospel, as indisputable, and they thus preclude any contemplation of alternatives or indeed of *what could be* (or of what should be - the moralistic preoccupation). Here, then, critical independence is construed largely in economic terms – the measures that define “success” in a capitalist society. Thus, Hughes, Tiseo and Rother all subscribe to such a position, being unapologetic about their assumption that schooling is meant to provide individuals with the capacity to be free as self-sufficient and socially contributory labourers.

The interviewees with a radical bent are not depoliticized. The centrality of ideology for radical teachers ensures that they have an acute awareness of the political significance of texts. These teachers stress primarily political repercussions, even while taking textual analysis as their project; they are, then, politicized English teachers. Nevertheless, like the political-economists who devote their studies to the way in which contexts dictate specific meanings, the radical text-analysts are similarly interested in asking *what is really going on?* Both groups become comfortable with presenting a theory of *distortion* resulting from media practices. Their aim is to get to the truth that has been masked by media processes; and they know what that truth is. Thus, a teacher who points, for instance, to differential personality indicators between men and women in various TV genres, has more in common with the teacher who examines the unequal labour practices of the media industries than one might initially suppose. Both are fairly confident in their

interpretation of the meaning of such phenomena, and both are unequivocal about relaying this view to their students.

This kind of certainty about the *real* reality translates, ironically, into the same transmission pedagogy upheld by the moralistic approach. It is a pedagogy decribed in the statements of Novek and Fortune, for instance, and it is occasionally expressed by Wilson and by Corcos. In each of their cases, critical independence becomes interpreted as an ability to see past veneers of illusion to the underlying "truth". Giroux and Freire informatively point out that

both radical and conservative educators often talk about the notion of the canon as if all that matters is that it contain the appropriate ideological knowledge and skills. Knowledge becomes something to be transmitted rather than questioned for its potential to help students critically assess the role they might take up as engaged and democratic citizens living in a world of increasing cultural diversity and conflict. (1989: xi)

The teacher is therefore still posited as the center of learning, possessor of a privileged body of knowledge that must be imparted to the unknowing pupil; the only difference is that, where the moralists' expertise tends to support the *status quo* through ideological imitation, the radical's expertise insists upon subversion. That challenge, however, is undermined by the positioning of students in passive roles, dependent on the enlightenment conferred by teachers and on the demystification that media educators can most effectively offer.

Programs following a radical approach consequently still proceed in the traditional fashion, with the instructor doing the majority of the talking, leading the students to very particular conclusions about the meanings of texts or contexts. There is little room for deviation, and the supposed devotion to freedom and empowerment seems sadly hypocritical. Appropriate mimicking of hegemonic disdain is rewarded. Any signs of persistence of hegemonic commitment are viewed as a lack of comprehension; the kid just doesn't *get it*! Henry Giroux calls this a position of content-focussed radicals - a perspective that results in a "limited pedagogical model, one which fails to integrate theory and process, content and methodology." (Giroux 1981: 64)

CHAPTER 7

CONGRUENCE OF ASSUMPTIONS: “COMMUNICATION” IN THE ACADEMY

It is presently argued that the four sets of assumptions expressed by the media educators, in their articulations of a possibility for holistic approaches, define a “communication perspective” as introduced in chapter 1. Such a communication perspective’s basic assumptions can also be found within academic mass communication theory. This chapter therefore discusses a number of theories and concepts that have contributed to the development of “communication” as an academic field of study. The chapter is structured according to the same four assumptions of the previous four chapters in order to show the compatibility of premises, and hence of *perspective*, across the educational and communicational realms.

Both fields of education and communication, at least within certain branches, are indeed increasingly coming to acknowledge a peculiarity in their *way* of dealing with the world, and it is a shared peculiarity that controverts a number of the foundationalist assumptions guiding modern Western thought. Of course, this perspective which has been variously named - “communication perspective” (Pearce), “ironism” (Rorty), “anthropological perspective” (Postman & Weingartner), “antirealism” (Fuller), “metaphorical perspective”, etc. - is not exclusively found in communication and education theory. Furthermore, these

multiple labels, in addition to “postmodernism” which brings its own swell of confusion, all have their distinctions; but all nonetheless recognize a tension between a reality that is *produced* in human experience and the necessarily human attempt to make judgments about that contingent world. And it is this commonality that supports a movement for solidarity between those fields that can entertain such a perspective since Western culture is still profoundly immersed in an opposing view, still denying the contingencies of reality. As Rorty notes, there remains a persistent “public hankering” after a sense of rationality “which is associated with objective truth, correspondence to reality, and method, and criteria.” (Rorty 1987: 466)

Numerous theorists have thus discussed perspectives that challenge foundationalism. Fuller for instance considers the debate between realists and antirealists, concluding that “realism is most forcefully refuted on its own terms” (71). He observes that the realist claims that

a theory of reference for a language need not admit what speakers of that language “mean” or “intend” by their sentences; it need only admit the entities (as identified in the best scientific theory) which caused the speakers to utter those sentences. However, to the antirealist, this simply looks like a subtle way of begging the question in favor of realism, since it presupposes that there is a fact of the matter about the reference of particular sentences, independent of the linguistic categories in which the world is conceptualized. (Fuller 70)

Similarly, Rorty offers his “ironist” as the “anti-metaphysician”, or as she who “thinks [that] nothing has an intrinsic nature, a real essence.” (Rorty 1990: 457) Rorty also recognizes the “intrinsically resentful”, antagonistic, and alienated position that ironism presumes, much like Postman and Weingartner stress the anthropologist’s sense of distance and otherness within their “anthropological perspective”. Some relate this challenge to a “crisis in ideology” (Denzin 1991), some notice a corresponding de-centering of identity (Rose 1996), and some accordingly call for a rethinking of evaluations of scholarly research (Jensen 1993). Each theorist has subsequently devised his/her own answers to the paradox between relativity and judgment attending such antifoundationalist positions. Those answers provide ample fodder for contemporary philosophers and they will not be reiterated here. Rather, attention will now be turned to the manner in which the four assumptions previously introduced emerge from a wide range of communication theory, bolstering the antifoundationalist stance. In thus paralleling the premises in the fields of mass communication and media education, the degree to which the same oppositional perspective informs each will highlight the compatibility of method that suggests a marriage of these “disciplines”.

Reality is Constructed by Media

Referring to communication in terms of disciplinarity has proven to be eminently problematic and the bane of the formal study of communication throughout its relatively brief history. The *Journal of Communication* has even devoted several issues (1983, 1993) to academic discussions of this disciplinary predicament. Gregory Shepherd therefore pointedly remarks that the “modern sense of communication” is *nonfoundational* and thus antithetical to the foundationalist and transmission-based sense of a discipline (Shepherd 1993: 91). In a comparable formulation, Creel Froman observes that “[m]eaning giving [] never needs grounding nor could it be given a grounding” (9). Such groundlessness (foundationlessness) is attributed to the understanding that meaning is grounded in itself as medium (Froman refers to the medium of “language”, p.9).

Davis and Jasinski therefore place communication studies under the umbrella of social science as they present its evolution toward “conceptions and generalizations that seriously undermine the assumptions of modernism” (1993: 151). These notions include the following assumptions. First, “the individual is a product of communication” (Davis & Jasinski 151) because subjectivity is dependent upon patterns of communication practices. Second, “the most basic and common function of communication is performance, not

transmission of information” (Davis & Jasinski 152). Davis and Jasinski add that “the social world consists of many overlapping and interrelated realities”, and that “our ability to create a seamless experience of reality is being severely tested.” (152)

Thus, as media educators (and particularly those with a holistic approach) have vehemently argued against a transmission model of pedagogy, communication theorists therefore combat the “transmission model of communication”, or the “bucket theory of knowledge”, as Popper clarifies it in terms of the model’s epistemological basis. Indeed, numerous communication scholars have, like teachers, realized that their work has minimal significance as well as poor applicability in practice if one perceives the human to be an empty vessel into which things called “knowledges” are, in direct proportion, cumulatively poured. The work has minimal significance within such a perspective because the concepts of communication and of education are terribly uninteresting if they are reduced to simple yes/no, have/have-not, success/failure binary questions with an accordingly prescribed inevitability. Furthermore, this transmission view depends, says Giddens using Quine’s term, on the idea of a “protocol language” (1976:135), a base medium of meaning that everybody understands exactly the same way. Teachers know instinctively that such a medium does not exist, and communication theory devotes itself to the explication of this modality.

Meaning making and anti-foundationalism

Thus, in accepting that meanings vary for different people, at different times, in different locations and social structures, and that reality comprises the sum of anyone's understandings of the world, both educators and communication scholars posit active humans in the continual process of making meanings, creating the realities they live. The precise metaphor of "meaning making" is, in one instance, proposed as most apt in the consideration of the relationship between communication and learning (Postman & Weingartner 91). Giddens thus summarizes the antifoundationalist essence of the principle of reality construction which insists that there can be no transcendental foundations of reality beyond human constructs.

The quest for unassailable 'foundations' of empirical knowledge is one which has occupied Western philosophers since Descartes, and has been pursued in modern times by empiricists and phenomenologists alike. Both come up with answers that presuppose an essentially passive relation between subject and object: in the first case, the bedrock is found in sense-experience, in the second, it is found in ideations that are regarded as distinct from experience and instead inform it. [...] But there can be no 'foundations' of knowledge that are unshakeably secure, or which are not theory-impregnated. (1976:134-135)

Giddens also consequently advocates a cessation of any search for fundamental 'laws' of the 'real' world, noting that the "framing of meaning is more fundamental than the uncovering of laws." (1989:56)

This idea of reality construction would not be so compelling if it did not consistently recur in many of communication's seminal texts, from a

significant cross-section of the field's most venerated figures. They cannot, of course, all be addressed. But some of them can be introduced in order to demonstrate how this principle underscores arguments from even antagonistic branches of communication research. The fact of disagreement among communication scholars is important to remember lest one might suppose that the declaration of any unifying assumption of communication is self-evident.

Hall, for instance, insists on the relational aspect of meaning: "It is a practice, not a thing." (1989: 47) Hall also stresses the "interpretive *work*" that must be performed by meaning decoders (1993: 99). He furthermore points to the function of human-made symbolization systems in the representation of different worlds, emphasizing how knowledge, meaning, and reality are contingent upon *our ways of representing* (1989: 47-48). This is what Carey means when he claims that "thought is predominantly public and social" rather than private (1989:28); it is public because it depends upon socially ratified systems of signification. But there is nothing foundationally "true" about social thought or its not infrequent agreement, for as Carey insists, any mode of representation "induces the dispositions it pretends merely to portray." (29) The concept is alternatively phrased: "we create what we pretend to merely describe" (Jensen 75) or "we literally and figuratively create ourselves" (Froman 69). Kuhn's notion of paradigms is a further articulation of this concept; Kuhn notes that paradigms suggest the

impossibility for an “empirically neutral system” (1970: 146) and provide meaning makers “not only with a map but also with some of the directions essential for map-making” (1970: 109). Carey therefore concurs that reality is *produced* (30), observing that our systems of representation - our symbols - are simultaneously “of” and “for” reality (29). It is for this reason that Rorty recommends the substitution of “the idea of ‘unforced agreement’ for that of ‘objectivity’” since it highlights the notion that intersubjective agreement is the most one could ask for in terms of “objective truth” (1987: 467). Froman also addresses the phenomenon of agreement within a socially/linguistically constructed world, saying, “That people would agree would have to be seen as part of a participation in the construction of reality, a consequence of learning one vocabulary rather than another.” (12)

Murdock likewise focuses on this variability of meaning in terms of both possibility and constraint, asserting a break with the “bucket” theory of meaning (1989: 236-237). He also, in concordance with others (e.g. Giroux, Simon, Grossberg), valuably adds the issue of pleasure to the notion of reality construction, noting how pleasure is implicated in the generation of identities and subjectivities (1989: 237). Grossberg observes further that the distinction between production and consumption is problematic (1995:74) in much the same way that Mattelart and Mattelart take issue with the term “consumption”. In each case, it is noted that the isolating of “consumption” implies inactivity,

which enables a concept of a passive viewer and subsequent trivialization of the consumer's role. These theorists, then, condemn a narrow understanding of production as limited to practices of manufacture (Grossberg 1995:74) and they equally subscribe to a theory of constructed reality in which the individual/consumer plays an integral role.

Marginalized but active: construction as "critical"

Such a conception of active engagement is particularly important as it relates to children, women, and other marginalized groups who are especially prone to characterizations of mindless victimization. In this way, the contingencies related to the construction of reality(ies) are aligned with relations of power, as Froman proposes with his theory of language. "Behind the establishment of reality in language is power, involving, among other things, our notions of knowledge and truth." (Froman 3) Bourdieu (1977) and Foucault (1971) discuss, as well, the illegitimacy of truth claims in terms of power relations. "There is no 'intrinsic strength of the true idea' ... It is always power relations which define the limits within which the persuasive force of a symbolic power can act" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977: 25). Thus, Hodge and Tripp's study of child audiences (1986) is noted for its radical assumption "that children are not fools or passive dupes able to be affected against their will and against their interests by the wicked stepmother called

television.” (Fiske 68) The construction of meaning is assumed to be much more complex and interactive, invoking the subtleties of power and arising from “a constant active struggle” (Fiske 68). Similarly, Murdock and Phelps’ study *The Mass Media and the Secondary Schools* (1968) concludes:

The evidence we have been able to gather indicates that most pupils have an active rather than a passive relationship with the mass media. The important question to ask therefore is not, what are the mass media *doing to* adolescents, but what are adolescents *doing with* the mass media. Far from accepting what they are offered wholesale, or just letting the material wash over them, most pupils are constantly making judgements and discriminations, selecting those elements which in some way speak to them and rejecting those that do not. (Murdock & Phelps 1968: 141)

Likewise, Bobo examines the intentionality behind women’s cultural readings; she premises her study of black female readers (1995) on the notion that a “specific audience creates meaning from a mainstream text and uses the reconstructed meaning to empower themselves and their social group.” (53) This idea can be contextualized within feminist media critics’ adherence to the social construction of reality (van Zoonen 1994) as it pertains to everyday conversational interchanges and to the conceptualization of gender in particular. Van Zoonen thus agrees with Carey’s ritual view of communication, noting the contingencies of gender definitions that result from the assumption that “[r]eality is not merely something that exists ‘out there’, but it is also (re)constructed by the social and sense-making activities of human beings.” (38)

The implication of the relevance of power relations as seen in feminist media studies as well as in the critical perspectives of theorists like Bourdieu, Hall, Foucault, Froman and others point to branches of communication theory outside of audience-based cultural analysis. This is an important observation. Contrary to some accusations (Carragee 1990), concepts of the construction of reality and of audience activity seem to be shared beyond research communities devoted to the idiosyncratic subjectivities of individual, decontextualized readers. The work of Larry Grossberg is cited, for instance, as exemplary of a perspective that combines a popular culture approach with neo-Marxist theory (Baran & Davis 330). Thus, Kavoori and Gurevitch's assertion of the symbiosis within communication's critical school can be extended beyond their recognition of a common "neo-Marxist model of society" among political economists and culturalist scholars (Kavoori & Gurevitch 1993: 417). Indeed, some proponents of the political economy of communication now appear to assimilate many of these subjectively constructivist views that once distinguished cultural theorists as antagonists.

Mosco, for instance, proclaims outright that his theory is to be founded in realism yet his realism proposes a world in which 'theory' and 'fact' are "mutually contaminated" (1996: 2). He writes, "Theoretical and empirical/interpretive practices influence and are influenced by one another *and* by the wider environment of social practices in which they

reside.” (2-3) Consequently, when he observes that a realist view means that “reality is made up of both what we see and how we explain what we see” (2), he is not only suggesting in typical realist fashion that what people see affects how they explain what they see. His proposition of mutual constitution and his desire not to perpetuate subject/object, concrete/abstract, empirical/theoretical dualisms (5) also pointedly suggest that how people explain what they see *affects what they see*. In this sense, Mosco concedes that systems of human derivation mitigate against the assertion of “pure fact” or “pure theory”, or indeed Truth. Mosco furthermore acknowledges the active meaning-making role of individuals even as they construct within various institutional and symbolic constraints. He claims that “the analysis of communication, is rooted in the needs, goals, conflicts, failures and accomplishments of ordinary people aiming to make sense of their lives” (251). Such a concern with the goal-directed interpretive actions of ordinary people demonstrates a trend in contemporary political-economy of communication which seeks to combine the lessons of cultural studies with the critical politics of a Marxist philosophy. It is a trend initiated, perhaps, by Raymond Williams’ expanded treatment of the concept of “hegemony”.

Williams’ notion of hegemony and its defining of reality is another formulation of reality construction through humanly devised systems and practices. Despite the fact that some Marxist critics view hegemony

in an economically prescriptive manner, a manner that bespeaks of an essentialism characteristic of a foundationalist perspective, Williams stresses an open concept of hegemony that is variable, contradictory, and in a state of permanent challenge (1991: 413). He argues that only with such a perspective can change be adequately accounted for. He suggests, moreover, that a direct equation between hegemony and the material base, through its oversimplification of the processes of meaning, does not consider the existence of meanings or senses of the world that oppose the dominant practices (Williams 1991: 414). Williams thus concludes, like the theorists mentioned above, that production and consumption should not be viewed distinctly, and that any cultural *text* (Williams refers to “art”) is a *practice*, not a thing (421). “The relationship between the making of a work of art and its reception is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of (changing) social organization and relationship, and this is radically different from the production and consumption of an object.” (Williams 1991: 421)

It should be pointed out that a number of the critics discussed here would undoubtedly object to being characterized in the context of perspectives labeled “ironic” or “metaphorical”. However, a “communication perspective” might sound more congenial to them (and this is partly why the term has been selected against the others). Indeed, it is not the contention that Raymond Williams is an antirealist. Still, it is proposed that all of the above theories, through their sanctioning of

assumptions of constructed and mutable realities, therefore contribute in an important way to the viability of an antirealist (communication) perspective. They do so by arguing against the validity in addressing transcendent foundations of meaning. There are a number of consequences to arguments of this nature and, from the premise of reality construction, certain ideas are revealed to lack legitimacy. Perhaps the best examples can be found in the assumption's implications for the understanding of media technologies and their uses.

Implications for views of technology

The communication perspective, with its rejection of essences, therefore cautions against four conceptions of technology. First, technology must not be perceived as merely a tool, a neutral carrier of information that innocently participates in pre-existing social relations. This is Meyrowitz's point when he notices that

The research on television has been severely limited to the extent that it views electronic media as new links among pre-existing environments. That is, such research ignores the possibility that, once widely used, electronic media may create new social environments that reshape behavior in ways that go beyond the specific products delivered.
(Meyrowitz 1985: 15)

Second and in complement to the first point, it is inconsistent to see technology as engaged with a "natural", constant environment. This inconsistency is important to bear in mind since it reflects a common error often made by critics of media applications in schools who, for

instance, take the “chalk and talk” model of schooling as a given into which new technologies must *fit* (see, for example, Hativa & Lesgold 1996). In contrast, communication scholar Lana Rakow offers the reminder that the taken-for-granted assumption inherent in arguments of any technological *imperative* presumes, problematically, that the future has already been determined; Rakow insists instead that the future always remains to be *imagined* and *created* (1993: 402).

The communication perspective thirdly cautions against the measuring of technological interaction in terms of a unitary concept of knowledge. Such an objectifying epistemology poses difficulties because the communication perspective views knowledge/meaning/text as a practice, not a thing. Thus, a commitment to a unitary notion produces a number of problematic dichotomies such as a distinction between knowledge and context (see, for example, Salomon & Perkins 1996). Theorists like Bourdieu and Passeron therefore stress the “omissions to which the sociology of education is condemned when it studies separately the school population and the organization of the institution or its system of values, as if it were dealing with two substantial realities whose characteristics pre-existed their interrelation” (1977:101). This kind of compartmentalizing is joined by another form of essentialism against which the communication perspective warns. Thus, social change is not seen to be attributable simply to technology in a technologically determinist equation because this only replaces the

essentialism of Truth with that of Technology. As Graham Murdock insists, “technologies, far from being external to social relations (as in arguments based on technological determinism) are extensions of them in the sense that they are always devised and applied within a particular configuration of power relations with pertinent consequences for patterns of sociability.” (1989: 233)

Mediated Reality is Best Apprehended by Textual Metaphor

Many communication theorists, like the high school media teachers, are furthermore concerned with a subject that is defined in terms of textual or linguistic qualifiers. Technology, language and literacy are, for instance, conflated in analogical formulations (Kress 1992). Thus, as numerous scholars claim, the new media represent a *new poetics* (Caldwell 1995) or *new languages* (Postman & Weingartner 1969; Ulmer 1989; Denzin 1991). The concept of “language” is an important adjunct to assumptions about the social construction of reality because language serves as the all-encompassing metaphor for the meaning constructing systems of mediation. Language, then, like the concept of technology within a communication perspective, is understood not simply as a tool toward meaning but as constitutive of meaning itself (Froman 1992; van Zoonen 1994). Giddens (1976) consequently speaks of “language-games” in terms of Kuhn’s constitutive concept of “paradigms” (144). Froman elaborates, stating that “[l]anguage creates

what we know" (3) and that increasing one's knowledge therefore depends on an increase in languaging (116). "We can do more when we do more differentiating and structuring in language. Knowing more about what we do is a matter of increasing our language about what we 'do.'" (Froman 1992: 116) Giddens further relates this linguistic framework to the assumption of reader activity, noting,

the social world, unlike the world of nature, has to be grasped as a skilled accomplishment of active human subjects; the constitution of this world as 'meaningful', 'accountable' or 'intelligible' depends upon language, regarded however not simply as a system of signs and symbols but as a medium of practical activity ... (Giddens 1976: 155)

Similarly, Denzin discusses the Baudrillardian lament associated with postmodern theory as he observes that the "sign has become reality" (7) and that lived experiences are transformed into a new form of "textuality" (12). Of course, the despair attached to such observations reveals a nostalgia for a differently constituted, non-textual reality of the past which some theorists argue out of existence. Texts may therefore be recognized, within this perspective, as the perennial products of particular moments of intersection between readers and languagings. This is Foucault's point when he advocates the abolishment of "the sovereignty of the signifier" (1971: 158), as it is Barthes' point when he proclaims the death of the author alongside the birth of the reader (1977: 1133). Barthes further notes, in "The Death of the Author", that reading and writing hearken the destruction of every origin, creating texts in an

eternal present; “there is no time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally *here and now*.” (1130-1132)

The “open text”

This notion that texts *emerge* from reading and do not *precede* reading is not found in a substantial amount of communication theory, however numerous theorists have moved to the assumption of an “open text” (also found in Barthes’ work) which teeters on this more radical view. Fiske notes, for instance, that the revaluation of audiences as active readers “requires a similar revaluation of the text”, and that texts must be treated not as “closed” but rather as a “structured polysemy” (Fiske 1987: 63-65). Van Zoonen similarly ascribes to media texts an openness to many interpretations and multiple meanings, and a “polysemic” character (1994: 41). Grossberg (1979) likewise rejects a notion of “bounded text”; and Morley (1989) insists that “the text does not occupy a fixed position but is always mobilized, placed, and articulated with other texts in different ways.” (22)

Intertextuality and the attending idea of the open text allude to the assumption of text as performance rather than as the result of transmission. Fiske, for instance, compares narrative to language in the way that both construct meaning intertextually without requiring a relationship with an objective truth. Narrative and language are said to have, instead, internal rules; their meaning-making processes thus

“signify not because of their operation upon reality, but because of their relationship to these processes in other narratives and other signifying forms.” (Fiske 128) One therefore recognizes another branch of communication theory – a *semiotic* branch – that focuses primarily on the semiotic codes and performative rules as they structure and delimit textual meanings. Hall may thus offer a theory of *encoding* and *decoding* (1980; 1993).

Expanded semiology

Caldwell justifies this semiotic interest among communication scholars by noting the expansion of the concept of language beyond traditional notions of the word. He asserts that the “defining property of signification” has come to be understood not in terms of conventional language but as the “ability to ‘model possible worlds’” (Caldwell 346). In this way, semiotics has come to encompass traditional literacy as well as what Walter Ong has named the “secondary orality” of the electronically mediated culture (see Fiske 106). Neil Postman (1992) therefore asserts the significance of semiotics (he refers to “semantics”) to communication theory, particularly as it pertains to views of education. He highlights the preoccupation with processes of meaning-making inherent to semantic studies and urges, “Every teacher ought to be a semantics teacher” (194). Accordingly, Postman encourages the development of a special class for all students that “would deal not only with the various

uses of language but with the relationship between things and words, symbols and signs, factual statements and judgments, and grammar and thought.” (194)

The semiotic branch of communication studies within the academy has been most frequently represented by researchers engaged in “content analysis” and examinations of “textual aesthetics” of media (e.g. Hodge & Tripp’s study of children and television 1986; Kaplan’s study of music television 1987; Caldwell’s study of “televisuality” 1995). Feminist research has had, in addition, a productive relationship with content analysis which has provided important contributions to feminist media studies and to the exploration of representations of gender (see, for instance: Busby 1974; Brabant & Mooney 1986; Vincent, Davis & Boruszkowski 1987; Lowry & Towles 1989; Copeland 1989; Hedley 1994).

However, the difference between structuralism and structuration (Murdock 1989: 227) is offered to counter the prescriptive and closed notion of semiotics as definitive science. Hall accordingly insists that “the semiotic remains the least closed, the least ‘scientific,’ in the old positivistic, ‘scientistic’ sense, because it is the domain that operates in a structured way but that remains open to the necessarily contingent field of history and practice.” (Hall 1989: 49) Meyrowitz consequently notices that investigations of media as structures often lack this awareness of dynamism and contingency. “Part of what is missing from the medium

theory studies is any real attempt to link an analysis of media characteristics with an analysis of the structure and dynamics of everyday social interaction" (1985: 23) Murdock seems to respond as he traces a conceptual evolution from "signs" and "languages" as governed by immutable, ahistorical rules (as in the case of Saussure's semiotic theory), to "discourses" emerging from dialectically dynamic yet constrained systems (1989: 235). It is in this context that Giddens' theorization of "frames of meaning" makes sense (1976: 142).

Language and selectivity

These frames are significant because they evoke images of inclusion and exclusion that are integral to the functioning of language. Such selectivity is made explicit in theories of media environments (Meyrowitz), discursive formations (Foucault), linguistic power (Froman), and language competencies (Bourdieu & Passeron). Indeed, all of these address what Morley calls the "question of power – i.e. the presence or absence of the power or cultural resources necessary to make certain types of meaning" (Morley 1989: 23). For, as Steve Fuller points out, "language constrains thought and action" (1988: 255). Language constrains in overt ways, as presented by such philosophers as Wittgenstein, Winch, Kuhn, Foucault, Althusser, and others who theorize that language monitors the justificatory procedures of a society (Fuller 255). It also constrains in subtler ways, as suggested by Heidegger and

Derrida who postulate that “simply *using* language can change *usage*” even without intentionally driven revolutions or ruptures in the frameworks (Fuller 255-256). This appears to be Meyrowitz’s (1985) point as well, with his proposition of “electronic situations” and his argument that situations of expression can alter meaning as surely as substantive variations.

What One Already Knows Determines What One Can Know

To summarize thus far, it may be concluded that the communication theorists discussed above share several interests. They address linguistically or textually or discursively constituted realities, people’s roles within that creative relationship, the role of power within that relationship, and patterns of learned behaviour and thought. Such interests indicate another: an interest in the already known. It is sometimes made explicit as in the case of Giddens who implicates the centrality of linguistics within communication theory and then explains that “the linguist studies ‘what we already know.’” (1989: 57) Similarly, Postman and Weingartner attend to the relationship between communication and learning, determining that “[w]e can, after all, learn only in relation to what we already know.” (62). However, in less explicit cases, this melange of concerns with language, text, interpretation, power and learning has propelled a number of scholars to deal with the

significance of prior knowledge in much the same (although perhaps more formal) way that the high school teachers have.

“Habitus” and evolutionary learning

The connection is probably most evident with Bourdieu and Passeron’s concepts of “habitus” and “cultural capital”. A habitus refers to an inculcated and irreversible disposition. It is defined as the “basic ‘schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action’ that inform concrete cultural practices” (Murdock 1989: 243). Murdock also notes that habituses structure preferences rather than prescribe *habits*. Thus, Bourdieu and Passeron argue that any learning is dependent upon the degree to which the current “lesson’s” habitus approximates those previously acquired; and all learning therefore builds on the “primary habitus” (ie. the disposition inculcated through the family in the initial stages of life) (42-43). In addition, cultural capital (also referred to as “linguistic capital”) denotes the measure of competency associated with the unequal categories and selectedness inherent to language use (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977: 72-73). “A cultural competency is the repertoire of discursive strategies, the range of knowledge, that a viewer brings to the act of [] creating meaning” (Bobo 1995: 58). Variations in habituses are therefore argued to parallel group or class distinctions (Bourdieu & Passeron 42), producing differences in people’s cultural capital. Despite the perhaps simplistic equation between habitus and

class at the exclusion of other possible factors of difference, the argument compellingly marries concerns with personal experience and knowledge to larger social implications.

Such positions clearly indicate that the examination of prior knowledge, tastes, interests, interpretations, and personal histories is not exclusively relevant to cultural theorists nor is it necessarily ignorant of issues of social power. What this line of argument does suggest, however, is that meaning and learning typically proceed in an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary fashion. Thus, even radical departures can only be understood in terms of precedence. Froman accordingly describes the tension between the maintenance of old realities and the emergence of new ones, dependent on the interplay of possibility and the constant reiteration “of connections already learned” (44). This seems to be Mosco’s assertion, too, as he somewhat contentiously defends the validity of “social relational and formational approaches”, even within political economy research (1996: 229). Careful to disavow any “romantic celebration” of the subject, Mosco nonetheless declares one of his objectives “to demonstrate how classes constitute themselves” (230). He discusses, for instance, the insight provided by feminist and other cultural studies that look at the interpretive (linguistically-based) axes of difference beyond class determinants (Mosco 1996: 250-253). These axes point significantly to

struggles between “familiar” and “unfamiliar” meanings (van Zoonen 1994: 38).

Familiarity and interpellation

The familiar and the conditions surrounding familiarity are, then, central to the communication perspective. Notions like “hailing” (John Fiske), “interdiscourse” (Michel Pecheux) and “interpellation” are developed to account for this phenomenon of identification between texts and readers. The concepts recognize that “[r]eaders are always already formed” (Morley 1989: 21), defined already by discourses through which further meanings can be made, *interpellated*. When the appropriate discourses are sufficiently *hailed*, the reader experiences *interest*. Hence, Fiske explains that “[r]eaders will only produce meanings from, and find pleasure in, a [text] if it allows for this articulation of their interests.” (83) Indeed, interest and meaning are coterminous.

The assumption is further extended to scholastic implications by some communication theorists. This is evidenced in Meyrowitz’s discussion of a shift in familiar discourses and its bearing on the schools. He explores a hypothesis of the blurring of once distinctly public and private spaces. The result, he suggests, is a “middle region” defined by new conditions of familiarity: more rapid socialization processes (Meyrowitz 1985: 60), rearranged group identities (1985: 56), and dissolving ranks of authority (1985:64). Meyrowitz proposes that

schools are affected to the extent that “childhood is no longer a time of innocence and isolation” (Meyrowitz 1985: 101); it is now characterized by discourses traditionally segregated as “adult”. Thus, while children at one time were kept ignorant of many ideas, “learn[ing] the myths and ideals before they learned about social reality”, they now, “[t]hrough television news and entertainment, [] learn too much about the nature of ‘real’ life to believe the ideals their teachers try to teach them.”

(Meyrowitz 255) Meyrowitz therefore insists that education must rethink its purpose and its subsequent organizational structure; “the school cannot assume that its function is to accompany the child in a slow climb up the steps of literacy from complete ignorance to social enlightenment.” (256) Adults are no longer privy to the mystified, secret knowledge upon which authority was built. And Meyrowitz consequently asserts that “if so much information is available outside traditional classrooms and through everyday media, then the role of school shifts from ‘giving answers’ to helping students formulate good questions and useful research strategies.” (Meyrowitz 1996: 105)

Similar concerns can be found in Postman and Weingartner’s argument for a “question asking” curriculum and an appeal to the interests of the learner (1969: 81). Also, Murdock and Phelps focus on the primacy of identification in learning. This is seen in their acknowledgment of the role media can play in the linking of education to a more broadly relevant discourse as perceived by adolescents. They

claim, “If media-based activities are seen as a necessary part of a more general attempt to create links between the school and the surrounding community, they must relate to the particular environment from which the pupils come.” (Murdock & Phelps 143) They additionally advocate “an education against alienation” (150) which implies an increased index of identification by reducing gaps between students’ school and non-school experiences, between teachers’ school and non-school experiences, and between teachers and pupils. This stance against alienation, it should be noted, points to a different kind of alienation than that proposed by Rorty as the necessary outcome of a doubtful stance toward one’s meanings. Murdock and Phelps’ conclusion seems to respond, rather, to an alienation that neglects whole territories of meaning before questioning can ever occur, producing apathy and defensive narcissism instead of engaged liberal uncertainty.

Critical Independence is the Main Social Value (for Education)

It is this position of engaged liberal uncertainty that is thought by communication perspective advocates to be reflective of the highest possible level of intellectual independence. Such a position is furthermore valorized by these individuals as the ultimate objective of democratic societies and their institutions. Tracing the centrality of the related notions of intellectual independence and reflexive doubt within the political philosophies of the communication theorists therefore

reveals the concordance of this ethical assumption between a number of communication scholars and the high school media educators.

Political aesthetics: genres instead of theories

Denzin thus remarks on Rorty's idealization of the liberal ironist stance in its capacity to generate understanding, compassion and solidarity (1992: 127) due to its recognition of everyone's common susceptibility to pain and humiliation. He adds nonetheless, in accordance with West (1989), that neither science nor philosophy seems capable of producing this kind of utopian compassion (Denzin 1992: 127). Rather, it is proposed that the ethics underlying critical engagement and change are most saliently addressed through practices or *genres* instead of theories, through the workings of such "popular" institutions as art and literature and the mass media. Denzin therefore quotes West:

This is a "task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist's report, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially the novel ... the novel, the movie, and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress" (Denzin 1992: 127).

The argument leads to an assertion of the political import of the popular in its role toward the development of freedoms or dependencies.

Moreover, the argument responds to what Denzin perceives to be a "highbrow" tendency in cultural theory's attendance to social and

political issues of value. "Cultural theory is sorely in need of a political aesthetics which values the popular as the main carrier of cultural values." (Denzin 1992: 138)

Caldwell seems to reply to Denzin's call, presenting a politics of style within his concept of "televisuality". He rhetorically asks: "Can there be any politics without style?" (Caldwell 1995: 353) Yet he also recognizes along with Denzin that stylistic analyses of popular forms appear to be "out of fashion" (353), with the marked result of neglect toward the political consequences and implications of highly influential discourses. Caldwell addresses some of these implications through the example of television's treatment of crisis as seen in the events surrounding the broadcast of the Rodney King beating and the riots following the Simi Valley trial verdict (302-335). He states,

Faced with an out-of-control catastrophe in the streets, television marshaled a command presence by invoking three of its most enduring control fantasies. Exhibitionist displays of technology, masculinity, and race-based journalistic authority were all thrown into the fray on a commercial-free, twenty-four-hour basis. (330-331)

The discussion of "televisual politics" in addition to "televisual economy" ends in Caldwell's plea on behalf of popular culture's – in theory and practice – academic legitimacy. Aesthetics are thus placed within a broader social political context. Caldwell finally suggests that a persistent segregation of the "academy" away from popular experience

ultimately poses the political danger of ignoring the possible manifestations of control therein produced (Caldwell 354-357).

Language and power: the structures of constraint

As already stated, issues of power and control are inextricably associated with language by many communication theorists. Formulations like that of Froman who concludes from the structuration of language that “[a]greement is powered” (10), or like that of Fuller who notes that “all knowledge is ‘value-laden’ or ‘interest-laden’” (12) exemplify such a perspective. Power is seen as both necessary and problematic, since it structures meaning but in inevitably exclusive ways. The linguistic orientations of the communication perspective therefore force theorists to consider the various factors of constraint and the effects that these limitations have on the potential for people to exercise *autonomy*. Thus, Murdock (1989) points out that even senior researchers within the tradition of uses and gratifications research now concede that “we must build into our outlook an explicit recognition that texts are not infinitely open and may allow a limited number of possible readings” (Blumler et al. 1985: 260). Cultural studies consequently turn their attention to the “ways in which the organization of texts constrains and facilitates audience activity.” (Murdock 1989: 237) Semiotics are therefore implicated, as well as the study of pleasures tied to aesthetic

forms, each attempting to account for what van Zoonen refers to as the “power to define” (1994: 39).

The power to define is accorded collectively and not simply on an individual basis. This, again, is where the wider social implications of meanings are addressed by the communication perspective. Fiske is therefore able to distinguish between “individuality” and “subjectivity”, where the latter term denotes a communally derived condition.

Our subjectivity, then, is the product of social relations that work upon us in three main ways, through society, through language or discourse, and through the psychic processes through which the infant enters into society, language, and consciousness. Our subjectivity is not inherent in our individuality, our difference from other people, rather it is the product of the various social agencies to which we are subjects, and thus is what we share with others. (Fiske 1987: 49)

Fiske’s precise account of the manner in which subjectivity is constructed may be disputed by others who share a communication perspective (ie. do society, language, and consciousness indeed represent *separate* processes?), but all nevertheless agree on the fact of subjectivity’s social origin.

The relationship between ideology and autonomy

Concepts of ideology and of hegemony consequently come into play. Barrett, for instance, discusses Therborn’s association of ideology with subjectivity and language codes. She notes, furthermore, that his position represents an extreme variation of Gramscian neo-Marxism that

seeks to define ideology beyond a strictly deterministic reversion to certainties of class imposition. In this case, ideology becomes intertwined with the matrix of social factors that structure both conscious and unconscious experiences (Barrett 30-31). Therborn's theory is, however, criticized for its absent epistemology, although it is not considered that his argument may be based in a different kind of epistemology: an epistemology of action (verb rather than noun, in Dervin's terminology). Knowledge/language is thus understood as practice, not thing. Barrett usefully quotes Therborn's definition of ideology to summarize his view.

Thus the conception of ideology employed here deliberately includes both everyday notions and "experiences" and elaborate intellectual doctrines, both the "consciousness" of social actors and the institutionalised thought-systems and discourses of a given society. But to study these as ideology means to look at them from a particular perspective: not as bodies of thought or structures of discourse *per se*, but as manifestations of a particular being-in-the-world of conscious actors, of human subjects. In other words, to conceive of a text or an utterance as ideology is to focus on the way it operates in the formation and transformation of human subjectivity. (Therborn, in Barrett 30)

Indeed, several communication scholars have similarly declared an interest in the media as ideological or as hegemonic, noting a parallel concern with notions of "dominance", "subordination", and "autonomy". Stuart Hall, for example, elaborates a theory of hegemony that is non-deterministic; he claims that it defines relations of power without ascribing positions of power permanently to anybody (Hall 1989: 51-52).

Moreover, he stresses the ideological aspect of media while resisting the tendency toward reification observed by some political economists as a critique of cultural analysis (see, for instance, Garnham 1983).

Communication does not *only* concern the ideological, says Hall, but it does imperatively raise the question of the ideological (1989: 48). This is because

[t]here is no way that the study of communication systems could proceed without understanding the social, technological, economic, the political conditions in which the systems of representation in society are located – how they are institutionally organized, how they are linked to particular positions and structures of power, and how they are crosscut by the field and operation of power. (Hall 1989: 48)

From this argument, he therefore decides that “communication is not autonomous []; it is necessarily ‘relatively autonomous.’” (48-49)

Autonomy (or independence) is, again, a primary concern. And it is presented with “objective” limitations. Accordingly, Giddens offers a notion of “‘objective’ causal conditions that influence human action” (1976: 154), adding that it is in the recognition of these conditions that transformation becomes possible. Such emphasis on the raising of awareness thus finds a comfortable home in educational theory as much as in communication studies, and it is not surprising that some media scholars (e.g. Bourdieu, Mattelart, Postman, Murdock, Meyrowitz) have studied education and communication conjointly. What is surprising is the relatively small number they represent. For it seems quite natural to

suggest, as Postman does (1992: 185), that education can serve as an important transformative force once the existence of causal conditions of action (or indeed of thought) is made explicit and debated in its multiply perceived manifestations. In this way, the communication perspective promotes self-understanding, because even though “self-understanding” is not the same as ‘autonomy’” (Giddens 1976: 154), it is the necessary precursor of the most independence one might ever hope to achieve.

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

MARRYING THEORY WITH PRACTICE: WHAT TWO FIELDS CAN OFFER EACH OTHER

In tracking the emergence of four central assumptions from the expressions of (a select group of) teacher's attitudes and strategies as well as from a number of important communication scholars, one may conclude that the two "communities" demonstrate significant similarities. The four assumptions, which lay ontological, epistemological and ethical bases for what has been called a "communication perspective", implicate the following ideas. First, "reality" is contingent and therefore has no "essence"; it is actively *constructed* as a result of the media through which it is necessarily experienced. Second, the structuring of meaning through media is directly or indirectly described as a process of *language*; the operation of meaning is consequently accounted for in terms of textual or conversational metaphors. Third, human subjects develop meanings in an evolutionary, not a revolutionary, way. Crudely put, this suggests that ideas don't come out of nowhere. This is what is meant by the insistence that future knowledge is always dependent on the manner in which already acquired knowledge is engaged. What one already knows determines what one can know, and "determination" is here conceived in both affirmative and negative senses; thus prior knowledge provides limitations as much as possibilities. Finally, the

interaction between mediated texts and already formed people is not merely a private phenomenon; it has social, political and economic significance. It is therefore proposed that such exchanges reproduce various social relations (of power) because the systems of signification through which past, present and future meanings are constructed are defined collectively rather than individually. Of course, all four of the assumptions are interrelated. In fact it is probably clear from the preceding discussions of relevant iterations under the separate headings that the premises bleed into one another. Nevertheless, this examination of fundamental cross-disciplinary commonalities raises a number of important and even urgent issues, addressing challenges within communication studies, education studies, and social/educational reform.

The term “cross-disciplinary” itself, in its inadequacy, signals one of the main reasons for this study’s pertinence. For one must acknowledge that decades of academic debate still have not resolved whether communication is, can be, or should be a “discipline”. Abigail Anderson Goodman thus explains in her interview that the problem with the disciplinary constitution of communication (she refers to “cultural studies”) is that, “arguably, cultural studies is everything.” James Beniger comparably remarks that “the field of communication might aspire to become [] queen of the social and behavioral sciences” because it plays such a “fundamental role in the central theories and models of

all relevant disciplines.” (1993: 31) He notes, too, that this synthetic quality derives from the field’s ability to address the Four Cs – cognition, culture, control, and communication – as method rather than simply as particular manifestations (28-29). Dervin similarly postulates that the strength of media scholarship is its “understanding of communication as *process* in myriad contexts [emphasis added]” (1993: 59), and she accordingly invokes the notion of communication as verb instead of noun.

However, Shepherd argues that this is precisely the reason for communication studies’ disciplinary quandary, since such a view of communication is “nonfoundational” and hence antithetical to the metaphysically based notion of an intellectual “discipline” (Shepherd 1993). The result is variously lamented: ferment in the current communication curriculum (Rakow 1993), disorientation and fragmentation among researchers (Shoemaker 1993), scholarship directed more by institutional weight than by truly significant questions (Newcomb 1993), isolation and irrelevance of the field (Docherty, Morrison & Tracey 1993). Indeed, the integrative potential of communication studies and the possibilities generated by the field’s supposed loosening of boundaries between theory and practice (Craig 1993) still seem unrealized. This is surely, at least in part, attributable to the academic relegating of the understanding of process to second-

class status (Dervin 59). Consequently, communication scholars “know a lot that we don’t know we know” (Dervin 60)

Bringing such latent understandings to the fore would therefore appear to be quite urgent if the opportunities provided by a synthetic communication “discipline” were to be seized. In fact, this disciplinary approach would involve the formulation of what Shepherd calls a “communication ontology” that defines Being in terms of process. He observes, furthermore, that a “communication ontology will be unlike those of other disciplines.” (98) It will argue “that existence is essentially symbolic, but that there is nothing ‘mere’ about that”, thus suggesting “a sort of self-generating foundation.” (Shepherd 98-99) It will also involve a recognition among disciples that they “have propelled a communicative way of looking at things” (Dervin 60), a “communication perspective”.

This is where education, and particularly media education, proves to be most contributory. Despite the fact that media and education share a pedagogical aspect, because “any practice which intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning is a pedagogical practice” (Giroux & Simon 1989: 230), education is nonetheless self-evidently tied to pedagogy in a way that media may not be. Pedagogy highlights understandings of process above all else; the hindrance of secondariness is, then, eliminated. The communication perspective is therefore more readily articulated from an educational point of view. This can be seen,

for example, using Meyrowitz's account of the fictional conceptual distinctions between media metaphors (as "conduits", as "languages", as "environments") perpetuated in communication theory to the detriment of a synthetic appreciation (Meyrowitz 1993). For, while analysis can separate considerations of "content", "grammar" and "medium", teaching cannot. The teacher's interest in pedagogical effectivity forbids such superficial differentiation. Thus, as communication scholars might herald the theoretical blurring of theory and practice, educators live it on a daily basis. In fact, communication theorists are sometimes most compelling when they speak as *teachers* and not as academicians. Media education theorist David Lusted is therefore led to comment on the pedagogical connection between teaching and media criticism, noticing how the connection emphasizes the issue of academic form. He pointedly states, "Critical [media] theory often carries a contradiction in its address, calling for change in its content whilst reproducing the existing relations in its form." (Lusted 1986: 87) His remark powerfully alerts one to the contradictions within scholars' own practices and to the manner in which these prevent holistic study.

Concerns with integration are indeed implicit in education. Steve Fuller accordingly notes that all disciplines have definitive borders but one. Pedagogy, he states, is the only "intrinsically synthetic" discipline; and he adds that "the idea of education presupposes that children can be taught the distinctive methods of *all* the disciplines." (Fuller 194) The

alignment of communication and education therefore seems not only practical but inevitable. And one is not shocked by such pleas as that of Piette & Giroux (1997): “attention must also be paid to the nature of the links that exist between media education and the theories of mass communication.” (96) Nearly two decades earlier, the Council of Europe held a symposium on “The Secondary School and the Mass Media”, from which the need to explore the connections between these two pseudo-disciplines was almost identically affirmed. “It would seem an appropriate moment, therefore, to reconsider the relations between communication and education systems in an effort to define new educational strategies incorporating education and communication in a single whole, and to undertake a thorough re-thinking of the allocation of functions and responsibilities between the two.” (1981: 14) Yet efforts to proceed toward this unifying perspective have been minimal. “One is especially struck,” observe Mattelart & Mattelart, “by the fact that there has been so little conceptual exchange between these two fields of research on social reproduction.” (1992: 9) Carey surmises that this is due largely to the dominant transmission model of communication that has engendered a specific alignment between communication and politics and economics at the expense of a richer conceptualization of education and of learning (Carey 1989: 34).

The present work therefore responds to those calls for more complete integration. It does so, furthermore, in the context of

communication's disciplinary uneasiness with the recognition that a new, educationally inspired perspective may open up new possibilities for resolution. If nothing else, the implicit and constant focus on pedagogical *practice* within education studies ensures that communication theorists remain firmly tethered to practical considerations of lived experience. Communication studies do not represent, however, the only field with problems that might benefit from previously unexplored positions. Notions as well as institutions of mass education are riddled with difficulties, revolving around such phenomena as a "motivation crisis" (Habermas), the "cultural contradictions of capitalism" (Shapiro), the limits of a "commonsense epistemology" (Bereiter & Scardamalia), the "spread of stupidity" (Lasch), and a collapse of traditional markers of authority (Meyrowitz). Theorizing education and communication conjointly sheds new light on these concerns and offers a whole other tradition – a highly compatible tradition – from which to formulate theoretical frameworks of understanding. As Jennifer Gore concedes, "neither Education (as a discipline) nor educational institutions have a monopoly on pedagogy. Those of us in education might benefit from an examination of pedagogical discourses and techniques in other fields ..." (1993: 133)

In fact, there is probably no other field as rife with scholastically compatible pedagogical models as that of communication. After all, communication studies are so often focused on the processes of meaning

construction within groups of people, and this is simply another formulation of an interest in *communal learning*. The school is democracy's institution of communal learning *par excellence*. Moreover, studies of popular media frequently stress notions of voluntary learning and active meaning negotiations which may unsurprisingly appeal to educators in their attempts to "enculturate" (Perkins, Jay & Tishman 1993) "responsible" and "independent" citizens. Theories of audience, of uses and gratifications, of interpellation, of symbolic interactionism, of cultural capital, of ideology, etc. thus provide those within the field of education with useful frameworks from which to formulate responses to educational challenges.

And indeed, challenges abound. These are usually presented in terms of either problems of educational "delivery" or problems of social contradiction. Regarding delivery, Larry Cuban's survey of American classrooms from 1880 to 1990 concludes that

current classroom organization discourages students from learning from one another, limits the growth of independent reasoning and problem solving, restricts opportunities for student decision-making at the classroom and school level, and largely ignores the contributions that the community can make to the students and that students can make to the community. (1993: 278)

Ellen Langer likewise argues that the "prevailing systems of education lead our students to impose constancy on a potentially varying environment" and hence foster "premature cognitive commitments" (1993: 45). Similarly, Bereiter and Scardamalia claim that the

caricatured comparison of schools to factories is apt as the “conventional, textbook-based instruction [] continues to be the prevalent mode” (192). They insist, as well, that schools contain three tragic flaws: (1) schooling deals only with formal knowledge and demonstrable skills; (2) knowledge objectives tend to be made invisible to the students; and (3) “scope for the exercise of expertise – for progressive problem solving, in other words – is generally available only to the teacher.” (Bereiter & Scardamalia 187-188)

Bereiter and Scardamalia locate these limitations within what they call a “commonsense epistemology” that follows from an “empty bucket” theory of learning (188). They note, furthermore, the inadequacy of such a *transmission* model and go on to assess the alternatives, concluding that neither the *didactic*, “back-to-basics” response nor the *child-centered* response provides a valid option. Didacticism simply aggravates the initial problem and child-centeredness, they say, offers no opportunity for growth. They turn, therefore, to a third model, one that is not yet established but “is beginning to take shape.” Bereiter and Scardamalia affix to this emerging model the label of “knowledge building communities”, and it is in its maturation that communication studies can be most instrumental. One need only list some of the characteristics accorded the knowledge building community in order to see the applicability of the communication perspective. For instance, the “focus is on problems rather than on categories of knowledge: not ‘the heart’ but

‘how does the heart work?’” (211) Inquiry is driven by students’ questions instead of by teachers’ questions, and teachers are *contributors, participants* in the learning process. In addition, “discourse is taken seriously” (211) while learning is pursued as a *collective, social* experience. Bereiter and Scardamalia offer this third model to suggest a way that “expertise” as a mode of thought can be made more accessible at all levels of instruction. However, such a leveling of the concept removes from it its most characteristic trait: its delineation of hierarchy. In this sense, Bereiter and Scardamalia reflect Jensen’s discomfort with expertise’s exercise of autocracy and control. They agree instead that teaching must be a dialogue, a *conversation*.

Christopher Lasch would likely disagree, though, displaying a certain skepticism toward notions of conversational learning that have, according to him, engendered nothing until now but the “spread of stupidity” (1979: 127). Lasch’s argument is instructive because it combines complaints about educational delivery with broader issues of social contradiction in a kind of pop culture litany. He details, then, the deterioration of language and literacy skills among students (128-129), the prevalence of student boredom (138), the fragmentation and disconnection of branches of knowledge from each other (146). He observes the undemocratic process of selection performed by the schools as a result of their service to the maintenance of a capitalist labor force (132-135). Ultimately, though, he argues that the real trouble in

education is with a consumption ethic that valorizes experience so much that the schools eagerly embrace experience and wind up being a (poor) substitute for it (153).

Shapiro's discussion of the "cultural contradictions of capitalism" brings one firmly into social paradoxes and furthermore contains a response to Lasch's disdain.

Indeed, for those of us more sympathetic to aspects of progressive educational reform we could only wish that schools had, in fact, entered an era in which they addressed individual needs, indulged students' interests or concerns, valued free expression and spontaneity. Alas, despite Lasch's history, this in no way describes schooling in American society which remains firmly embedded in the matrix of traditional bourgeois virtues – discipline, restraint, achievement, and an emphasis on future salvation (or, at least, graduation). (Shapiro 1990: 49)

Shapiro subsequently talks about the meagre level of intrinsic satisfaction derived from a system of schooling that depends on delayed gratification and promises for the future (51). He addresses Habermas' notion of a "motivation crisis" in an effort to account for the capitalist derivation of an ethic of postponement and an ideology of achievement which still structure educational institutions and yet which are undermined in a late capitalist society. "Indeed the present crisis of public education may be understood as related to its declining value as an investment" (Shapiro 51). Shapiro points out, too, that schools, encounter popular culture in a relationship of antithesis, and that scholastic education emphasizes conformity over exploration,

fragmentation over holism (52-53). He contextualizes these problems within the chronic democratic paradox that requires the education system to produce free thinking individuals who will nevertheless constitute a well-adapted labor force. "The ideology of contemporary society thus maintains a demand for educational activities that are both corporate-integrative *and* enhance the free development of the individual." (Shapiro 66)

Shapiro's analysis of education policies and of educational reform in the context of democracy therefore "raises the question, ultimately, as to what extent genuine individualization would be reconcilable with the usual hierarchical orders [] found in schools." Such concerns with questions of autonomy and hierarchy, equally found in the educational sociologies of Young (1971), Apple (1979), Bourdieu (1971) and many others, clearly parallel questions to which numerous communication scholars have addressed themselves. An integrative approach would therefore permit a uniquely sophisticated look at ongoing and crucial changes to educational philosophies and policies.

In addition to education's central place as one of democratic society's most influential "ideological state apparatuses", it has also become intricately woven into contemporary political rhetoric. So close to the experiences of every citizen, education is one of those topics about which everyone has an opinion; and those opinions, often dissatisfied, are propelling all kinds of movement for change. This is due, in part, to

the educational “problems” mentioned above that are recognized now as substantial challenges in the advanced capitalist, postmodern culture.

Since the study began with a group of Quebec educators, it is perhaps appropriate to end with a brief discussion of the formal educational reform that is currently underway in that province. The curriculum is right now in the midst of being redrafted. The reorganization of the school programs is proceeding according to the report of a task force that was presented to the Ministry of Education in June of 1997. These recommendations include such statements as: “Special attention must be paid to developing students’ interest in culture”; and “Special attention must be paid to all of the elements that can contribute to the integration of knowledge.” (“Reaffirming the Mission of Our Schools”, hereafter “RMOS” chap.2, p.13) The importance in “making connections” and countering the past tendency toward “balkanization” in the curriculum is especially underlined by the task force’s theorization of “cross-curricular learning”. Clause 1.3 of chapter 4 reads: “We recommend that cross-curricular learning be introduced into the curriculum.” This is bolstered by an appendix explaining the content components of cross-curricular learning, which include “consumer education”, “citizenship education”, studies in “new information and communications technologies”, and “media education”. These are all to be variously integrated in core courses entitled “Language”, “History”, “Geography”, “Citizenship Education” and

“Understanding of the Contemporary World”. The objective, expresses the report, is to “establish a form of horizontal integration”, thus allowing “the emergence of a true interdisciplinary approach.” (“RMOS” chap.2, p.16) It is also insisted that “each school must be a small-scale democratic society” (“RMOS” chap.7, p.12) Furthermore, the “language skills” aspect of cross-curricular learning promotes a pedagogy of “literacy across the curriculum”. (“RMOS” chap.4, p.12)

Of course, these are all just words and the true test of reform resides with evaluations of actual practices. However, the whole report (along with the forthcoming new curriculum) represents substantial steps within a highly politicized arena of educational debate. Important questions surround these words. How reasonable and consistent are the plans for curricular adjustment? What values do they portray? Are these acceptable values? Abigail Anderson Goodman comments that cross-curricular learning poses more contradictions than it solves when it is injected into a system that is still reluctant to relinquish disciplinary boundaries in so many of its practices, not the least of which is testing. Lee Rother emphasizes that curricular reform is futile if it is not accompanied by re-evaluations of pedagogy that infiltrate those closed classroom doors behind which teachers still teach anyway they want. He supports the integrative rhetoric yet wonders: “if teaching anyway you want means that you’re not teaching any different[ly] from what was happening before, then where’s the reform?” And there remains, too, the

more unsettling question about whether even non-traditional approaches to schooling could ever really result in the “democratic” education so glorified by some reformists. Or indeed, whether this would be desirable. These are complex questions to be sure, and they are, at last, political questions.

It is the present argument, then, that the field of mass communication theory and research can importantly contribute to and enrich this political debate. This has already been recognized to some extent, and the winter 1998 issue of the *Journal of Communication* engages in a symposium surrounding the issue of media education. Indeed, media education constitutes a most appropriate bridging concept within current drives toward integration (Monahan 1993). As Robert Kubey claims, media education seems especially apt at revealing “how closely interlinked and inseparable are political economy, geography, history, demography, culture, government, and education.” (Kubey 1998: 67) Because media literacy is so tied to issues of citizenship, its consideration from a communication perspective can only contribute to the possibilities for an extended democracy (Lewis & Jhally 1998); whether those possibilities are ever realized remains to be seen. In thus overcoming what Neil Postman has described as academics’ “vigorous contempt for the subject of education” (1988: 82), communication scholars can experience an invigorated sense of their public significance. They can thereby emerge from their “monkish condition of isolation and

silence" (Docherty, Morrison & Tracey 1993: 239), too frequently feared to signify the death knell of communication studies' critical relevance.

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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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