

## **Media Literacies and Critical Pedagogy in a Multicultural Society**

**Douglas Kellner**

**(<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>)**

A large number of educators and theorists recognize the ubiquity of media culture in contemporary society, the growing trends toward multicultural education, and the need for media literacy that addresses the issue of multicultural difference. There is growing recognition that media representations help construct our images and understanding of the world and that education must meet the dual challenges of teaching media literacy in a multicultural society and sensitizing students and publics to the inequities and injustices of a society based on gender, race, and class inequalities and discrimination. Recent critical studies see the role of mainstream media in exacerbating these inequalities and the ways that media education and the production of alternative media can promote a healthy multiculturalism of diversity and more robust democracy. They thus confront some of the most serious challenges and problems that face us as educators and citizens as we move toward the twenty-first century.

In this paper, I first discuss how critical pedagogy can promote multicultural education and sensitivity to cultural difference, and then focus on the importance of a wide range of types of critical literacy to deal with the challenges of the cultural and technological revolution that we are currently involved in. Such concerns are part of a critical pedagogy which challenges educators, students, and citizens to rethink established curricula and teaching strategies to meet the challenge of confronting and dissecting cultural representation in our increasing multicultural and technological society. The project involves teaching the skills that will empower citizens and students to become sensitive to the politics of representations of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other cultural differences in order to empower individuals and promote democratization. My argument is that education today needs to foster a variety of new types of literacy to empower students and to make education relevant to the challenges of the present and future. My assumption is that new technologies are altering every aspect of our society and we need to understand and make use of them both to understand and transform our world.

### **Multiculturalism and Media Pedagogy**

A recent reader *Shared Differences* demonstrates how media of cultural representation such as film, video, photography, and multimedia can be used to promote multicultural education (Carson and Friedman 1995). The text opens with a statement by co-editor Diane Carson that a sense of urgency concerning America's increasingly multicultural society drove her and Lester Friedman to investigate how multicultural education can help us invigorate education for the contemporary era: "A teacher's inclusion of multicultural pedagogy and an active engagement with diverse ethnic, racial, and national issues is critical to America's social well-being... We must put our beliefs into practice, aware that the defining characteristics and enabling understanding of ethnic, racial, and national groups can and ought to be taught. Teachers must acknowledge uniqueness and difference as they also applaud similarity, for the strength of small communities and also society at large derives from celebrating our diversity" (ix).

Carson expands her pitch for multicultural education as a response to deal creatively with growing diversity, which facilitates "strategies for sharing, understanding, and enjoying" our proliferating cultural multiplicities and differences (x). She urges developing strategies for action, that will promote multicultural understanding, that will empower students, and that will strengthen education. Carson's and Friedman's dual project is to argue that the issues of multiculturalism are central to academic disciplines from literature to anthropology, and that media pedagogy can serve to promote the goals of multicultural education and critical media literacy. They accordingly assemble a broad array of studies by teachers who use media technology to promote multiculturalism in a number of disciplines in two and four year colleges. Each of their 14 contributors outlines course goals, discusses how they use media and media education to promote these goals, and analyzes their course experiences. Each also presents the syllabus used in the course to provide practical models of how to organize courses in multicultural education and media pedagogy.

The result is a very useful collection of models of practical criticism that will enable teachers in various fields to use media education to promote goals internal to their discipline. On the whole, the collection advances the social goals of making teachers and students sensitive to the politics of representation, to how media audiences' images of race, gender, sexuality, and cultural differences are in part generated by cultural representations, how negative stereotyping presents harmful cultural images, and the need for a diversity of representations to capture the cultural wealth of contemporary America. Teachers can gain insight into how media can serve their pedagogical goals and how they can both use media to promote multicultural education and to use this material to teach media literacy as well.

Following Carson's Preface and overview of the project, the collection opens with an essay by co-editor Lester Friedman, "Struggling for America's Soul: A Search for Some Common Ground in the Multicultural Debate." Friedman notes the current conflicts over multiculturalism in American society and the debates over multicultural education in the academic world. In this contentious and conflicted terrain, he suggests, we must seek common ground, to articulate what unites as well as divides us, and come to appreciate our commonalities as well as our differences. Indeed, the rancor in some of the education wars over curricula, pedagogy, and education in general are part and parcel of broader cultural wars between competing groups and ideologies fighting over the future of U.S. society and culture. Since educational debates are often intimately connected with political struggles, it is necessary to articulate clearly the different positions within the debates and if possible and appropriate to seek a common ground for consensus.

Indeed, I have long believed that there is no necessary conflict between traditional and multicultural education, that the education process is strengthened with the incorporation of voices, viewpoints, and perspectives excluded from traditional canons, and that multicultural curricula, deployed wisely, can improve many academic courses. Friedman attempts to articulate some principles that would enable multicultural education to enrich rather than replace the traditional curriculum and that would provide a common ground for both traditionalists and multiculturalists to rethink education. Reaching a common and higher ground in the debates over education require, in Friedman's view: acknowledging that while knowledge is constructed and transmitted from specific locations that "knowledgeable, well-trained teachers can generate

discussions about cultures other than their own," (3). For Friedman this entails accepting that multicultural curricula need not "be taught only, or even primarily, to members of ethnic minorities," nor that "one monocultural approach (e.g., Eurocentrism) [be replaced] with another monocultural methodology (e.g., Afrocentrism)" (3).

If multicultural education is to promote genuine diversity and expand the curriculum, it is important both for groups excluded from mainstream education to learn about their own heritage and for dominant groups to explore the experiences and voices of minority and excluded groups. Moreover, as Friedman stresses, while it is important and useful to study cultures and voices excluded from traditional canons, dead white European male authors may have as much of importance to teach all students as excluded representatives of minority groups whom multiculturalists want, often with good reason, to include in the curriculum. Thus, Friedman convincingly argues that: "Western culture, despite its myriad faults, remains a crucial influence on American political, intellectual and social thought and, as such, should play an important role in classrooms" (3).

Indeed, few advocates of multicultural education call for jettisoning the traditional canon and altogether replacing the classics with new multicultural fare. Genuine multicultural education requires expanding, not contracting, the curricula, broadening and enriching it, not impoverishing it. It also involves, as Friedman stresses, including white ethnic groups in the multicultural spectrum and searching out those common values and ideals that cut across racial and cultural boundaries. Thus, multicultural education can both help us understand our history and culture, and can move toward producing a more diverse and inclusive democratic society.

Shared Differences suggests how multicultural education can be used to enrich the subject matter of many traditional disciplines, ranging from literature to anthropology. In addition, traditional disciplines and texts can themselves be taken as the topic of critical scrutiny and inquiry, and can thus be used to promote the pedagogical goals of developing sensitivity to cultural difference. The emphasis in the reader is on using a medley of media material to present aspects and effects of the politics of representation from a variety of perspectives. Thus, an anthropologist discusses how media culture can be used to teach ethnography and cultural critique which is sensitive to cultural representation and difference (Michael M.J. Fischer); writing teachers present a course dedicated to writing about literature and various forms of popular media which helps make students aware of the forms of cultural rhetoric and difference (Margaret Himley and Delia C. Temes); an English professor (Linda Dittmar) discusses how the English curriculum can be transformed by the addition of film and media culture; a public health professor (Clarence Spigner) discusses how negative media representations can contribute to problems of health and social well-being; and historian Carlos E. Cortes discusses how media education can contribute to better historical understanding and socio-political sensitivity.

These studies provide a variety of arguments for the importance of including media texts in the curricula and how using and studying the media can advance the aims of a variety of pedagogic practices. The teaching of writing, for example, as Himley and Temes stress, is enhanced by engaging students in analyzing cultural rhetoric and difference in various domains of social discourses. Print journalism, film, television, photographic images, advertising, and political rhetoric are all forms of writing, all cultural texts that influence how we see the world, and the

practice of critically dissecting these writings helps us to see how all of these cultural forms represent different modes of writing with their own biases and perspectives. Attending to the representation of difference within the broader field of society and culture can enable students to avoid manipulation by cultural rhetorics and to empower students to find their own voices within the cacophony of competing and conflicting discourses of the present age. Critically dissecting cultural materials also empowers students to reflect upon their own commonalities and differences, and to respect their differences from others, while becoming critical of those who would suppress differences or present some differences (racial, gender, class, etc.) negatively, stereotypically, and pejoratively.

The authors in *Shared Differences* thus present arguments legitimating the use of media materials in a number of disciplines to promote both traditional pedagogic goals (the transmission of knowledge, the cultivation of reading and writing skills, the mastering of fields and disciplines), as well as to contribute to the production of a more diverse democratic polity that appreciates and affirms differences between ethnic, racial, and cultural groups. On the other hand, many of the teachers who are using multicultural media as a tool to promote their own disciplines downplay the importance of cultivating media literacy as an important tool in developing students' critical and analytical skills. One needs to be aware that each media technology (film, video, photography, multimedia, and so on) have their own biases, their own formal codes and rules, and that the ways in which the media themselves construct and communicate meaning needs to be an explicit focus of awareness and analysis.

Indeed, media culture constructs models of multicultural difference, privileging some groups, while denigrating others. Grasping the construction of difference and hierarchy in media texts requires learning how they are constructed, how they communicate, and how they influence their audiences. Textual analysis of media artifacts helps to reveal their codes and conventions, their values and ideologies, and thus their meanings and messages. In particular, a critical cultural studies should analyze representations of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, and other identity markers in the texts of media culture, as well as attending to national, regional, and other cultural differences, how they are articulated in cultural representations, and how these differences among audiences create different readings and receptions of cultural texts.

On the whole, the contributions to *Shared Differences* focus on using media to promote multicultural education and downplay theorizing and developing the skills of media literacy. Most of the contributors focus on the politics of positive/negative representations and do not present more complex methods of gaining media literacy, or articulate more general principles or models. Although many of the practical course curricula and syllabi present materials for developing media literacy, this topic is not overtly theorized and is merely mentioned in passing. In the next section, therefore, I will engage a series of books published over the past decade that contribute to developing a critical pedagogy of media literacy. The argument for developing such skills as part of standard educational training is that the media themselves are a form of cultural pedagogy and thus must be countered by a critical media pedagogy that dissects how media communicate and effect their audiences and how students and citizens can gain skills to critically analyze the media.

## Media Literacy and the Challenges of Contemporary Education

While *Shared Differences* focuses on multicultural media pedagogy as a response to the challenge of developing multicultural education and understanding, a large number of books on media literacy over the past decade start from the premise of the ubiquity of media culture in contemporary society and produce a more general argument for critical media literacy as a response to media bombardment. "Media literacy" involves knowledge of how media work, how they construct meanings, how they serve as a form of cultural pedagogy, and how they function in everyday life. A media literate person is skillful in analyzing media codes and conventions, able to criticize media stereotypes, values, and ideologies, and thus literate in reading media critically. Media literacy thus empowers people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, and to investigate media effects and uses.

A critical media literacy is necessary since media culture strongly influences our view of the world, imparting knowledge of geography, of technology and the environment, of political and social events, of how the economy works, of what is currently going on in our society and the world at large. Media entertainment is also a form of cultural pedagogy, teaching dominant values, ways of thought and behavior, style and fashion, and providing resources for constituting individual identities (Kellner 1995a). The media are both crucial sources of knowledge and information and sources of entertainment and leisure activity. They are our story tellers and entertainers, and are especially influential since we are often not aware that media narratives and spectacles themselves are a form of education, imparting cultural knowledge, values, and shaping how we see and live our social worlds.

Consequently, media literacy is an important part of multicultural education since many people's conceptions of gender, race, ethnicity, and class are constituted in part by the media which are often important in determining how people view social groups, conceive of gender roles of masculinity and femininity, and distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, attitudes and behavior. Since the media also provide role models, conceptions of proper and improper conduct, and provide crucial cultural and political information, they are an important form of pedagogy and socialization. A media literate person is thus able to read, understand, evaluate, discriminate and criticize media materials, and ultimately, as I shall suggest below, produce media artifacts, in order to use media as means of expression and communication.

Sometimes "the media" are lumped into one homogeneous category, but it is important to discern that there are many media of communication and forms of cultural pedagogy, ranging from print media such as books, newspapers, and magazines to film, radio, television, popular music, photography, advertising, and many other multimedia cultural forms, including video games, computer culture, CD-Roms, and the like. Media literacy thus requires traditional print literacy skills as well as visual literacy, aural literacy, and the ability to analyze narratives, spectacles, and a wide range of cultural forms. Media literacy involves reading images critically, interpreting sounds, and seeing how media texts produce meaning in a multiplicity of ways (Kellner 1989c and 1995a). Since media are a central part of our cultural experience from childhood to the grave, training in media literacy should begin early in life and continue into adulthood, as new technologies are constantly creating new media and new genres, technical

innovations, aesthetic forms, and conventions are constantly emerging.

Len Masterman has been associated with helping inaugurate a media literacy movement and his book *Teaching the Media* (1989 [1985]) is frequently cited in the literature on the topic as a key text. Masterman makes the case that the ubiquity of the media in transmitting knowledge requires educators from primary schools to post-school to impart critical knowledge of how the media work, construct meaning, and function in everyday life. Yet Masterman's focus is on "delineation of a number of general principles for teaching across the media" (1989: vii i-ix) and he does not really develop a concept or practical pedagogy of media literacy in his book. Rather, drawing heavily on British cultural studies, he provides a comprehensive overview of media education, discussing such topics as media institutions, text and rhetoric, ideology, audiences, and approaches to media education.

Masterman's text provides a useful general introduction to teaching the media, though his British-oriented approach might provide blocks to using his book in a North American setting. Moreover, while a general media literacy may be of some use in transmitting some general ideas and principles, one needs to develop a media literacy that is sensitive to the differences among the specific media, engaging students in critically analyzing and dissecting a wide range of media materials, including such disparate phenomena as TV news, rock music, action-adventure film, advertising, and multimedia web sites. Hence, the principle of difference should not only be part of a multicultural education making students sensitive to social and cultural difference, but one should also see how different media construct their materials in different ways. One also needs to construct different forms of media literacy according to the age, interests, needs, and capacities of specific students. Obviously, teaching media literacy in kindergarten through the elementary grades is going to involve different strategies and pedagogy than teaching media literacy to high school, college, or adult audiences.

Contributions of a critical pedagogy of difference are found in recent contributions to expanding media literacy by scholars influenced by post-structuralist theory. Allan Luke and Carmen Luke have pointed to the usefulness of post-structuralist thought in rethinking education under contemporary conditions (see, inter alia, Luke and Luke 1990). Carmen Luke has shown how difference is often occluded in mainstream media culture and how cultural studies in the classroom can generate alternative readings and critically valorize difference. In turn, Allan Luke has shown how a post-structuralist-inspired discourse analysis can help dissect the construction of difference in cultural texts and be an important instrument in a critical pedagogy (forthcoming).

Although we are moving into an increasingly global media culture, critical media pedagogy should probably engage in classroom instruction media and cultural material familiar to students in different countries and parts of the world. In the 1990s, for instance, a series of books have been published in the United States dealing with various dimensions of media literacy and education which engages North American media material. Thus, whereas earlier cultural studies and models of media literacy often engaged material from English and Australian contexts that were not always accessible to individuals in the North American context, there is now a burgeoning tradition of cultural studies engaging material from a variety of cultures, ranging from the United States to Taiwan, in what might be seen as the globalization of cultural studies.

Thus, whereas John Fiske's earlier works primarily dealt with the English and Australian materials and the contexts in which he was himself living, teaching, and researching, his more recent books focus on North American media culture and contexts, reflecting his new domicile (Fiske 1993, 1994). Henry Giroux (1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997), Peter McLaren (1995, 1996), and others have linked cultural studies with critical pedagogy and systematically elaborated theoretical principles and models, while carrying out practical studies of contemporary media culture. In all of these cases, the issue of multiculturalism and the analysis of gender, race, and class in terms of the politics of representation and audience reception are stressed. Similar emphases are also found in the cultural studies of Grossberg (1992), Kellner and Ryan (1988), Kellner (1990, 1992, and 1995), and a number of other works in North American cultural studies (see the collections edited by Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler 1992; Giroux and McLaren 1994; and Dines and Humez 1995).

Other note-worthy attempts to develop a critical pedagogy focusing on cultivating media literacy and multicultural education include the work of James Schwoch, Mimi White, and Susan Reilly (1992) who recognize that the media are a form of pedagogy which construct social knowledge and requires critical dissection of its mode of teaching. The authors demonstrate how media images, discourse, symbols, and narratives constitute social meanings and subjectivities. Critically scrutinizing the dominant forms of media culture, the authors develop a critical pedagogy of representation that dissects the values, meanings, and ideologies constructed in media texts. Combining analysis of news/information and entertainment, the authors see "media as perpetual pedagogy" and provide critical insights into the sort of pedagogy provided by mainstream media while providing a counterpedagogy of their own.

In the same critical spirit, David Sholle and Stan Denski discuss media education and the (re)production of culture, critically analyzing the social production of knowledge through mass media of communication and proclaiming the need for a critical pedagogy that criticizes its limitations, distortions, and biases. The authors stress the importance of building bridges across disciplines, using theory to connect media education with the empowerment of students and the promotion of radical democracy. Combining the critical theory of the Frankfurt school with British cultural studies, feminism, and postmodern theory, Sholle and Denski call for contextualizing education within the framework of its functions in U.S. society, and they connect critical pedagogy and media education with transformative practice and the goal of producing a more democratic society.

In addition, Sholle, Susan Reilly, Peter McLaren, and Rhonda Hammer have published a co-authored text *Rethinking Media Literacy* (1995) which provide theoretical models of critical media literacy, practical studies that exemplify the project, and attempts to develop the literacies that will help make possible more critical and empowerment students and citizens. In particular, Hammer indicates how student video projects can empower students to learn the conventions and techniques of media production and use the media to advance their own aims. Whereas film production involves heavy capital investment, expensive technology, and thus restricts access, video production is more accessible to students, easier to use, and enables a broad spectrum of students to actually produce media texts, providing alternative modes of expression and communication. Video technology thus provides access to a large number of voices excluded from cultural production and expression, materializing the multicultural dream of democratic

culture as a dialogue of a rainbow of voices, visions, ideas, and experiences.

The books that I have discussed all address the issue of promoting multiculturalism and media literacy on a University level. They are geared for the most part to college undergraduate and even graduate teaching and thus are on a fairly high level of sophistication. Yet one could argue that multicultural and media literacy should be taught at all stages of education, that it is extremely important to begin teaching multiculturalism and media literacy at early levels. Moreover, I would suggest that media material can be especially valuable in teaching multiculturalism and positive social values to young children, in view of the important role of media culture in their lives. There are indeed associations, groups, and texts that are oriented toward teaching multicultural education and media literacy to younger students. Survey of this vastly expanding material goes beyond the limits of this study, and here I merely want to mention the scope of importance of teaching media literacy and multiculturalism on all levels from kindergarten through graduate school and beyond. We live in a world of media and new technologies, and our social world is increasingly multicultural, providing new opportunities to enjoy richness and diversity, but also producing new social conflicts and problems.

It is the challenge of education and educators to devise strategies to teach media literacy while using media materials to contribute to advancing multicultural education. For, against McLuhan who claims that the younger generation are naturally media literate (1964), I would argue that developing critical media literacy requires cultivating explicit strategies of cultural pedagogy and models of media education. Yet within educational circles, there is a debate over what constitutes the field of media pedagogy, with different agendas and programs. A traditionalist "protectionist" approach would attempt to "inoculate" young people against the effects of media addiction and manipulation by cultivating a taste for book literacy, high culture, and the values of truth, beauty, and justice. Neil Postman in his books *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) and *Technopolis* (1992) exemplifies this approach.

A "media literacy" movement, by contrast, attempts to teach students to read, analyze, and decode media texts, in a fashion parallel to the cultivation of print literacy. Media arts education in turn teaches students to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of media and to use various media technologies as tools of self-expression and creation. Critical media literacy, as I would advocate it, builds on these approaches, analyzing media culture as products of social production and struggle, and teaching students to be critical of media representations and discourses, but also stressing the importance of learning to use the media as modes of self-expression and social activism.

Critical media literacy not only teaches students to learn from media, to resist media manipulation, and to empower themselves vis-a-vis the media, but it is concerned with developing skills that will empower citizens and that will make them more motivated and competent participants in social life. Critical media literacy is thus tied to the project of radical democracy and concerned to develop skills that will enhance democratization and participation. Critical media literacy takes a comprehensive approach that would teach critical skills and how to use media as instruments of social change. The technologies of communication are becoming more and more accessible to young people and average citizens, and they should be used to promote education, democratic self-expression, and social progress. Thus, technologies that

could help produce the end of participatory democracy, by transforming politics into media spectacles and the battle of images, and by turning spectators into cultural zombies, could also be used to help invigorate democratic debate and participation (Kellner 1995a and 1995b).

Indeed, teaching critical media literacy should be a participatory, collaborative project. Students are often more media savvy, knowledgeable, and immersed in media culture than their teachers and thus can contribute to the educational process through sharing their ideas, perceptions, and insights. On the other hand, critical discussion, debate, and analysis should be encouraged with teachers bringing to bear their critical perspectives on student readings of media material. Since media culture is often part and parcel of students' identity and most powerful cultural experience, teachers must be sensitive in criticizing artifacts and perceptions that students hold dear, yet an atmosphere of critical respect for difference and inquiry into the nature and effects of media culture should be encouraged.

Another complexity in developing critical media pedagogy results from the fact that in a sense it is not a pedagogy in the traditional sense with firmly-established principles, a canon of texts, and tried-and-true teaching procedures. Critical media pedagogy is in its infancy, it is just beginning to produce results, and is thus more open and experimental than established print-oriented pedagogy. Moreover, the material of media culture is so polymorphous, multivalent, and polysemic, that it requires sensitivity to different readings, interpretations, perceptions of the complex images, scenes, narratives, meanings, and message of media culture which in its own way is as complex and challenging to critically decipher as book culture.

I have, in fact, so far downplayed hostility toward media education and the media themselves. Educational traditionalists conceive of literacy in more limited print-media paradigms and, as I suggested above, often adopt a "protectionist" approach when they address the issue of the media at all, warning students against corruption, or urging that they limit media use to "educational" materials. Yet many teachers on all levels from kindergarten to the University have discovered that media material, judiciously used, can be valuable in a variety of instructional tasks, helping to make complex subject matter accessible and engaging. Obviously, media cannot substitute for print material and classroom teaching, and should be seen as a supplement to traditional materials rather than a magic panacea for the failures of traditional education. Moreover, as I argue in the next section, traditional print literacy and competencies are more important than ever in our new high-tech societies.

It is also highly instructive, I would argue, to teach students at all levels to critically engage popular media materials, including the most familiar film, television, music, and other forms of media culture. Yet, here one needs, however, to avoid an uncritical media populism, of the sort that is emerging within certain sectors of British and North American cultural studies. In a review of *Rethinking Media Literacy* (McLaren, Hammer, Sholle, and Reilly 1995), for instance, Jon Lewis attacked what he saw as the overly critical postures of the contributors to this volume, arguing: "If the point of a critical media literacy is to meet students halfway -- to begin to take seriously what they take seriously, to read what they read, to watch what they watch -- teachers must learn to love pop culture" (1996: 26). Note the authoritarian injunction that "teachers must learn to love popular culture" (italics are Lewis'), followed by an attack on more critical approaches to media literacy.

Teaching critical media literacy, however, involves occupation of a site above the dichotomy of fandom and censor. One can teach how media culture provides significant statements or insights about the social world, positive visions of gender, race, and class, or complex aesthetic structures and practices, thus putting a positive spin on how it can provide significant contributions to education. Yet one should also indicate how media culture can promote sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, and other forms of prejudice, as well as misinformation, problematic ideologies, and questionable values. A more dialectical approach to media literacy engages students' interests and concerns, and should, as I suggested above, involve a collaborative approach between teachers and students since students are deeply absorbed in media culture and may know more about some of its artifacts and domains than their teachers. Consequently, they should be encouraged to speak, discuss, and intervene in the teaching/learning process. This is not to say that media literacy training should romanticize student views, however, that may be superficial, mistaken, uniformed, and full of various problematical biases. Yet exercises in media literacy can often productively involve intense student participation in a mutual learning process where both teachers and students together learn media literacy skills and competencies.

It is also probably a mistake to attempt to institute a top-down program of media literacy imposed from above on teachers, with fixed texts, curricula, and prescribed materials. Teachers and students will have very different interests and concerns, and will naturally emphasize different subject matter and choose examples relevant to their own and their student interests. Courses in critical media literacy should thus be flexible enough to enable teachers and students to constitute their own curricula to engage material and topics of current concern, and to address their own interests. Moreover, and, crucially, educators should discern that we are in the midst of one of the most intense technological revolutions in history and must learn to adapt new computer technologies to education, as I suggest in the following section.

#### New Technologies, Multiple Literacies, and Postmodern Pedagogy: The New Frontier

The studies on multicultural education and critical media literacy that I have examined up to this point neglect to interrogate computer culture and the ways that the Internet and new computer technologies and cultural forms are dramatically transforming the circulation of information, images, and various modes of culture. And so in this concluding section that is looking toward education in the next century, I want to argue that students should learn new forms of computer literacy that involve both how to use computer culture to do research and gather information, as well as to perceive it as a cultural terrain which contains texts, spectacles, games, and interactive media. Moreover, computer culture is a discursive and political location in which they can intervene, engaging in discussion groups, creating their web sites, and producing new multimedia for cultural dissemination. Computer culture enables individuals to actively participate in the production of culture, ranging from discussion of public issues to creation of their own cultural forms.

It is indeed a salient fact of the present age that computer culture is proliferating and so we have to begin teaching computer literacy as well from an early age on. Computer literacy, however, itself needs to be theorized. Often the term is synonymous with technical ability to use computers, to master existing programs, and maybe engage in some programming oneself. I

want, however, to suggest expanding the conception of computer literacy from using computer programs and hardware to developing, in addition, more sophisticated abilities in traditional reading and writing, as well as the ability to critically dissect cultural forms taught as part of critical media literacy. Thus, on this conception, genuine computer literacy involves not just technical knowledge and skills, but refined reading, writing, and communicating ability that involves heightened capacities for critically analyzing, interpreting, and processing print, image, sound, and multimedia material. Computer literacy involves heightened abilities to read, to scan texts and information, to put together in meaningful patterns mosaics of information, to construct meanings and significance, to contextualize and evaluate, and to discuss and articulate one's own views.

Thus, in my expanded conception, computer literacy involves technical abilities concerning developing basic typing skills, using computer programs, accessing information, and using computer technologies for a variety of purposes ranging from verbal communication to artistic expression. There are ever more implosions between media and computer culture as audio and video material becomes part of the Internet, as CD-Rom and multimedia develop, and as new technologies become part and parcel of the home, school, and workplace. Therefore, the skills of decoding images, sounds, and spectacle learned in critical media literacy training can also be valuable as part of computer literacy as well. Furthermore, print literacy takes on increasing importance in computer world as one needs to critically scrutinize and scroll tremendous amounts of information, putting new emphasis on developing reading and writing abilities. Indeed, Internet discussion groups, chat rooms, email, and various forums require writing skills in which a new emphasis on the importance of clarity and precision is emerging as communications proliferate. In this context of information saturation, it becomes an ethical imperative not to contribute to cultural and information overload, and to concisely communicate one's thoughts and feelings.

In a certain sense, computers are becoming the technological equivalent of Hegel's Absolute Idea, able to absorb everything into its form and medium. Indeed, computers are now not only repositories of text and print-based data, but also contain a wealth of images, multimedia sights and sounds, and interactive environments that, like the media, are themselves a form of education that require a critical pedagogy of electronic, digitized, culture and communication. From this conception, computer literacy is something like a Hegelian synthesis of print and visual literacy, technical skills, and media literacies, brought together at a new and higher stage. While Postman and others produce a simplistic Manichean dichotomy between print and visual literacy, we need to learn to think dialectically, to read text and image, to decipher sight and sound, and to develop forms of computer literacy adequate to meet the challenges of an increasingly high tech society.

Thus, a postmodern pedagogy requires developing critical forms of print, media, and computer literacy, all of crucial importance in the new technoculture of the present and fast-approaching future. Whereas modern pedagogy tended to be specialized, fragmented, and differentiated and was focused on print culture, a postmodern pedagogy involves developing multiple literacies and critically analyzing, dissecting, and engaging a multiplicity of cultural forms, some of which are the products of new technologies and require developing new literacies to engage the new cultural forms and media. Indeed, contemporary culture is marked by a proliferation of image

machines which generate a panoply of print, sound, environmental, and diverse aesthetic artifacts within which we wander, trying to make our way through this forest of symbols. And so we need to begin learning how to read these images, these fascinating and seductive cultural forms whose massive impact on our lives we have only begun to understand. Surely, education should attend to the new image culture and teach how to read images and narratives as part of media/computer/technoculture literacy. Such an effort would be part of a new critical pedagogy that attempts to critically empower individuals so that they can analyze and criticize the emerging technoculture, as well as participate in its cultural forums and sites.

Moreover, in addition to the critical media literacy, print literacy, and computer literacy, discussed above, multiple literacies involve cultural literacy, social literacy, and ecoliteracy. Since a multicultural society is the context of education in the contemporary moment, new forms of social interaction and cultural awareness are needed that appreciate differences, multiplicity, and diversity. Therefore, expanded social and cultural literacy is needed that appreciates the cultural heritage, histories, and contributions of a diversity of groups. Thus, whereas one can agree with E.D. Hirsch (1987) that we need to be literate in our shared cultural heritage, we also need to become culturally literate in cultures that have been hitherto invisible, as Henry Louis Gates and his colleagues have been arguing in their proposals for a multicultural education.

Social literacy should also be taught throughout the educational systems, ranging from focus on how to relate and get along with a variety of individuals, how to negotiate differences, how to resolve conflicts, and how to communicate and socially interact in a diversity of situations. Social literacy also involves ethical training in values and norms, delineating proper and improper individual and social values. It also requires knowledge of the contemporary societies and thus overlaps with social and natural science training. Indeed, given the tremendous role of science and technology in the contemporary world, given the threats to the environment, and need to preserve and enhance the natural as well as social and cultural worlds, it is scandalous how illiterate the entire society is concerning science, nature, and even our own bodies. An ecoliteracy should thus appropriately teach competency in interpreting and interacting with our natural environment, ranging from our own body to natural habitats like forests and deserts.

The challenge for education today is thus to promote multiple literacies to empower students and citizens to use the new technologies to enhance their lives and create a better culture and society based on respect for multicultural difference and aiming at fuller democratic participation of individuals and groups largely excluded from wealth and power in the previous modern society. A positive postmodernity would thus involve creation of a more egalitarian and democratic society in which more individuals and groups were empowered to participate. The great danger facing us, of course, is that the new technologies will increase the current inequalities based on class, gender, and racial divisions. So far, the privileged groups have had more immediate access to the new technologies. It is therefore a challenge of education today to provide access to the new technologies and the literacies needed for competence in order to overcome some of the divisions and inequalities that have plagued contemporary societies during the entire modern age.

Yet, there is also the danger that youth will become totally immersed in a new world of high-tech experience and lose its social connectedness and ability to communicate and relate

concretely to other people. Statistics suggest that more and more sectors of youth are able to access cyberspace and that college students with Internet accounts are spending as much as four hours a day in the new realm of technological experience. The media, however, has been generating a moral panic concerning allegedly growing dangers in cyberspace with lurid stories of young boys and girls lured into dangerous sex or running away from home, endless accounts of how pornography on the Internet is proliferating, and the publicizing of calls for increasing control, censorship, and surveillance of communication -- usually by politicians who are computer illiterate. The solution, however, is not to ban access to new technologies, but to teach students and citizens how to use these technologies so that they can be used for productive and creative rather than problematical ends.

To be sure, there are dangers in cyberspace as well as elsewhere, but the threats to adolescents are significantly higher through the danger of family violence and abuse than seduction by strangers on the Internet. And while there is a flourishing trade in pornography on the Internet, this material has become increasingly available in a variety of venues from the local video shop to the newspaper stand, so it seems unfair to demonize the Internet. Thus, attempts at Internet censorship are part of the attack on youth which would circumscribe their rights to obtain entertainment and information, and create their own subcultures. Consequently, devices like the V-chip that would exclude sex and violence on television, or block computer access to objectionable material, is more an expression of adult hysteria and moral panic than genuine dangers to youth which certainly exist, but much more strikingly in the real world than in the sphere of hyperreality.

New technologies are always demonized and in studying the exploding array of discourses which characterize the new technologies, I am rather bemused by the extent to whether they expose either a technophilic discourse which presents new technologies as our salvation, that will solve all our problems, or they embody a technophobic discourse that sees technology as our damnation, demonizing it as the major source of all our problems (Kellner, forthcoming). It appears that similarly one-sided and contrasting discourses greeted the introduction of other new technologies this century, often hysterically. To some extent, this was historically the case with film, radio, TV, and now computers. Film, for instance, was celebrated by early theorists as providing new documentary depiction of reality, even redemption of reality, a new art form, new modes of mass education and entertainment -- as well as demonized for promoting sexual promiscuity, juvenile delinquency and crime, violence, and copious other forms of immorality. Its demonization led in the United States to a Production Code that rigorously regulated the content of Hollywood film from 1934 until the 1950s and 1960s -- no open mouthed kissing was permitted, crime could not pay, drug use or attacks on religion could not be portrayed, and a censorship office rigorously surveyed all films to make sure that no subversive or illicit content emerged (Kellner 1997).

Similar extreme hopes and fears were projected onto radio, television, and now computers. It appears whenever there are new technologies, people project all sorts of fantasies, fears, hopes, and dreams onto them, and I believe that this is now happening with computers and new multimedia technologies. It is indeed striking that if one looks at the literature on new technologies -- and especially computers -- it is either highly celebratory and technophilic, or sharply derogatory and technophobic. A critical theory of technology, however, and critical

pedagogy, should avoid either demonizing or deifying the new technologies and should instead develop pedagogies that will help us use the technologies to enhance education and life, and to criticize the limitations and false promises made on behalf of new technologies.

Indeed, there is no doubt that the cyberspace of computer worlds contains as much banality and stupidity as real life and one can waste much time in useless activity. But compared to the bleak and violent urban worlds portrayed in rap music and youth films like *Kids* (1995), the technological worlds are havens of information, entertainment, interaction, and connection where youth can gain valuable skills, knowledge, and power necessary to survive the postmodern adventure. Youth can create new, more multiple and flexible selves in cyberspace as well as new subcultures and communities. Indeed, it is exciting to cruise the Internet and to discover how many interesting Web sites that young people and others have established, often containing valuable educational material. There is, of course, the danger that corporate and commercial interests will come to colonize the Internet, but it is likely that there will continue to be spaces where individuals can empower themselves and create their own communities and identities. A main challenge for youth (and others) is to learn to use the Internet for positive cultural and political projects, rather than just entertainment and passive consumption.

Reflecting on the growing social importance of computers and new technologies makes it clear that it is of essential importance for youth today to gain various kinds of literacy to empower themselves for the emerging new cybersociety (this is true of teachers and adults as well). To survive in a postmodern world, individuals of all ages need to gain skills of media and computer literacy to enable ourselves to negotiate the overload of media images and spectacles; we all need to learn technological skills to use the new media and computer technologies to subsist in the new high-tech economy and to form our own cultures and communities; and youth especially need street smarts and survival skills to cope with the drugs, violence, and uncertainty in today's predatory culture (McLaren 1995).

It is therefore extremely important for the future of democracy to make sure that youth of all classes, races, genders, and regions gain access to new technology, receiving training in media and computer literacy skills in order to provide the opportunities to enter the high-tech job market and society of the future, and to prevent an exacerbation of class, gender, and race inequalities. And while multiple forms of new literacies will be necessary, traditional print literacy skills are all the more important in a cyberspace of word-processing, information gathering, and Internet communication. Moreover, what I am calling multiple literacy involves training in philosophy, ethics, value thinking, and the humanities which I would argue is necessary now more than ever. Indeed, how the Internet and new technologies will be used depends on the overall education of youth and the skills and interests they bring to the new technologies which can be used to access educational and valuable cultural material, or pornography and the banal wares of cybershopping malls.

Thus, the concept of multiple literacy and the postmodern pedagogy that I envisage would argue that it is not a question of either/or, e.g. either print literacy or media literacy, either the classical curriculum or new curricula, but a question of both/and that preserves the best from classical education, that enhances emphasis on print literacy, but that also develops new literacies to engage the new technologies. Obviously, cyberlife is just one dimension of

experience and one still needs to learn to interact in a "real world" of school, jobs, relationships, politics, and other people. Youth -- indeed all of us! -- needs to learn to interact in many dimensions of social reality and to gain a multiplicity of forms of literacy and skills that will enable us to create identities, relationships, and communities that will nurture and develop our full spectrum of potentialities and satisfy a wide array of needs. Our lives are more multidimensional than ever and part of the postmodern adventure is learning to live in a variety of social spaces and to adapt to intense change and transformation. Education too must meet these challenges and both use new technologies to promote education and devise strategies in which new technologies can be used to create a more democratic and egalitarian multicultural society.

### References

Carson, Diane, and Lester D. Friedman (1995) *Shared Differences*. Multicultural Media & Practical Pedagogy. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Dines, Gail, and Jean Humez (1995), editors, *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*. Thousand Oaks, Ca. and London: Sage.

Fiske, John (1993) *Power Plays*. Power Works. New York and London: Verso.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1994) *Media Matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fleming, Dan (1993) *Media Teaching*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Giroux, Henry (1992) *Border Crossing*. New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1993) *Living Dangerously*. Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference. New York: Peter Lang.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1994) *Disturbing Pleasures*. New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1996) *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth*. New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1997) *Channel Surfing: Race Talk and the Destruction of Today's Youth*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Giroux, Henry and Peter McLaren (1994), editors, *Between Borders*. Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies. New York: Routledge.

Grossberg, Lawrence (1992) *We Gotta Get Out of this Place*. New York and London: Routledge.

Grossberg, Lawrence, Nelson, Cary and Paula Treichler (1992), editors, *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Hirsch, E.D. (1987) *Cultural Literacy*. New York: Random House.

Kellner, Douglas (1989), "Reading Images Critically: Toward a Postmodern Pedagogy," *Journal of Education*, Vol. 170, Nr. 3: 31-52.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1990) *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder, Col: Westview.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1992) *The Persian Gulf TV War*. Boulder, Col: Westview.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1995a) *Media Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1995b) "Intellectuals and New Technologies," *Media, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 17: 201-217.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1997) "Hollywood and Society: Critical Perspectives," in *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Film*, edited by John Hill. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_ (forthcoming) "New Technologies, TechnoCities, and the Prospects for Democratization." In *New Technologies and TechnoCities*, edited by John Dowling. London: Sage Books.

Kellner, Douglas and Michael Ryan (1988) *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press.

Lewis, Jon (1996) "Practice What You Preach," *Afterimage* (Summer 1996): 25-26.

Luke, Allan (forthcoming) "Theory and Practice in Critical Discourse Analysis," in *International Encyclopedia of the sociology of education*, edited by L. Saha. Eisevier science Ltd.

Luke, Carmen (1994) "Media and Cultural Studies," in *Constructing Critical Literacies* edited by Freedbody, P., Muspratt, A and Luke, A. Norwood, NJ and Sidney: Hampton Press and Allen and Unwin.

Luke, Carmen and Luke, Allan (1990) "School Knowledge as simulation: Curriculum in postmodern Conditions," *Discourse*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April): 75-91.

Masterman, Len (1989 [1985]) *Teaching the Media*. London and New York: Routledge.

McLaren, Peter (1995) *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1996) *Revolutionary Multiculturalism*. London and New York: Routledge.

McLaren, Peter, Rhonda Hammer, David Sholle and Susan Reilly, (1995) *Rethinking Media Literacy. A Critical Pedagogy of Representation*. New York: Peter Lang.

McLuhan, Marshall (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Signet Books.

Postman, Neil (1985) *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. New York: Viking-Penguin.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1992) *Technopolis: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Random House.

Schwoch, James, Mimi White, and Susan Reilly (1992) *Media Knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Sholle, David and Stan Denski (1994) *Media Education and the (Re)Production of Culture*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey.