Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for Social Change

by

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Bachelor of Education, University of British Columbia, 2000

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

This project examines the organization, design and implementation of a middle years English Language Arts (ELA) unit entitled *Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for Social Chang*e informed by the author's question: [H]ow can my students use spoken word poetry and digital media to be authentic writers in the 21st century to advocate for, and possibly create, social change? Chapter 1 introduces the project through a discussion of particular challenges and opportunities for literacy learners and teachers in our rapidly changing digital age. Considerations of personal and social challenges for adolescents are presented along with the need for engaging in digital composition in the classroom. Curricular connections are addressed leading to the guiding question for this project: What are the pedagogical challenges and opportunities in creating and supporting a writing program that articulates critical pedagogies and new literacies for the potential of students' personal and social transformation? Chapter 2 defines the project's two main frameworks – critical pedagogy and New Literacies – and examines recent literature regarding the implementation of each in diverse educational contexts. Chapter 3 presents a critical reflection on the unit's six phases: (1) Exposure to and dialogue about social issues; (2) Inquiry into issues that require social transformation; (3) Learning spoken word poetry; (4) Digital video composition; (5) Performance night; and (6) Taking a stand. Together with these sections, an accompanying Unit Plan and student hand-outs created by the teacher and included as Appendices, are intended as a professional learning resource for educators who wish to explore the potential for creating social change through the composition and digital presentation of students' spoken word poetry.

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Acknowledgements

Chapter 1

Introduction

"What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become

themselves" ~ Paulo Freire (Horton, Freire, Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1990, p. 181)

Locating my project

During the past school year of 2014-15, I explored the potential for transforming

self and society through critical pedagogy and new literacies practices in my grade 6/7

language and literacy classroom. Informed by critical pedagogy theorists including Freire

(1970) and Giroux (1981), and New Literacies theorists such as Lankshear and Knobel

(2013) and Leu (2014), I have worked to transform my teaching, and more specifically

develop a unit entitled *Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for

Social Chang*e that intentionally centred on my students taking ownership of their own

critical literacy development and the shaping of society. For this purpose, I used a critical

pedagogical framework that begins with valuing students' identities and facilitating social

change through a critical viewing, examination and discussion of social injustices and

power imbalances we witness in the news or experience in our own lives. I invited my

students to compose spoken word poems that advocated for change in relation to those

issues. The students then represented the poems in both non-digital and digital contexts

using new literacies practices. The question that guided this transformation in my

language and literacy teaching, and the development of the unit was, "How can my

students use spoken word poetry and digital media to be authentic writers in the 21st

century to advocate for, and possibly create, social change?"

Throughout this first chapter, I further contextualize my Master of Education project by presenting particular challenges and opportunities that our digital times pose for contemporary learners; discussing the authenticity of writing online; making connections between the existing and draft British Columbia English language arts curricula, and new literacies and critical pedagogy practices; and introducing how and why my pedagogy has recently transformed. I begin by presenting particular challenges and opportunities in our digital times.

Digital times: Challenges and Opportunities

In the 21st century, opportunities for engaging students in authentic and potentially transformative writing are perhaps more prevalent than ever before. With the rapid development of the Internet and social media, young people are increasingly becoming published authors of personal writing; making their diverse voices easily accessible to a broad audience. Today's classroom teachers – many of whom were born in a different technological and communications era than their students, and who have developed their careers within traditional educational systems – may reject their students' use of digital media as a means of composing and presenting their work to a broad audience through online platforms such as blogs or vodcasts. Yet many of today's students, having been born into and grown up in this digital age, have an inherent sense of "digital wisdom" (Prensky, 2012). This wisdom arises from both the use of digital technologies to access "cognitive power beyond our innate capacity and to wisdom in the prudent use of technology to enhance our capabilities" (Prensky, 2012, p. 202). These same students use digital platforms as an authentic way to communicate personally online, and sometimes publish publicly as authors.

This digital age has also seen an increase in the number and variety of media outlets that are accessed by students (Leu, O'Byrne, Zawalinski, McVerry & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009). Increasingly, these outlets present a world that seems to be in a state of crisis. On YouTube™, through Twitter™, and on various news channels that stream content on the Internet 24 hours a day, students witness societal challenges such as the devastation of ecosystems or the eradication of species; corporate greed and the government's complicity; ongoing struggles of poverty and hunger; objectification, rape and bullying; and discrimination due to ethnicity, gender, beliefs or appearance. It is true that our social and environmental worlds are often in a state of strife despite all of the advances in areas such as digital technology, food cultivation and medicine. Scientist and environmentalist David Suzuki (2009) argues that the exponential growth and damaging impact of our world's rapidly increasing population, new technologies, and corporate-driven consumer-oriented economy directly creates disparity, hardship and planetary damage. Such challenges, whether big or small, societal or personal cannot be denied – they are as ubiquitous as the cell phones which many kids carry. Yet, I believe that digital platforms and media can be used authentically along with students' critical literacy to both address these challenges, and to help transform their own personal lives and the society around them. I discuss this potential for change and authenticity in the next two sections.

Addressing change by making a change

In my experiences as an educator during the past fifteen years, students come to school with a variety of personal issues that they struggle to resolve. Many middle years children are struggling through an awkward stage of developmental learning to

understand themselves, and they are faced with pressures from many directions – parents, family, peers, and society. Evidence suggests that youth develop purpose from these pressures targeted towards life-satisfaction, coping, generosity, optimism, humility, mature identity status, and more global personality integration (Mariano & Going, 2011). As they try to understand their world, adolescents look to a variety of avenues – often through the Internet – to create a deeper understanding of themselves and their struggles. I witness daily that adolescents will feel persecuted or singled out for their differences, ridiculed or belittled for a perceived weakness, or bullied for what they wear or whom they choose as friends. But also, many students have a desire to speak out against those wrongs. Students, it seems to me, need to have authentic opportunities to target these personal and social issues, and to effect change. Writing online through digital platforms is one way to address their need for authenticity and change.

Writing Online for Authenticity of Audience and Purpose

Writing and composition in the 21st century holds many opportunities for authenticity of purpose, audience and multimodal content for contemporary adolescents. Students embrace writing about real issues that impact them, their social community and their world. Middle years students also thrive from opportunities to write for audiences beyond the classroom teacher, particularly when they can focus on an authentic purpose that has the potential to change their personal or social realities. In my experiences, when middle years students are presented with opportunities to explore and write about personal and social challenges in their compositions, they develop their voices as authentic writers.

Importantly, social media and the Internet have created opportunities for those teachers and students who would embrace them; opportunities not only to write about injustices in contexts that many students find more authentic, but also to be read by broad audiences. With a sense of digital wisdom (Prensky, 2012), many of my students also enrich the content of their writing in digital contexts by adding multimodal content such as images, video, sound and visual effects, music and animation in their compositions to better convey their message and meaning. Such digital composition is important because "we need to prepare children for their social and economic futures through transformative pedagogies [which include] explicit instruction on how multimodal texts work to achieve their purposes" (Thomas, 2011, p. 91). Students writing with these aspects in mind – authenticity of purpose, audience and multimodal content – in online contexts supports their personal development and their potential to change society. In the next section, I make connections between the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2006, 2013) existing and draft English language arts curricula, and how these documents support critical pedagogy and students' new literacies practices.

Curricular Connections

The current British Columbia Ministry of Education's Integrated Resource Package (IRP) and draft curriculum for middle years English language arts can be understood to support both critical pedagogy – particularly dialogism, personalization, and inquiry, and new literacies practices – and expanding notions of text and multimodalities.

In the BC ELA IRP (2006), oral language, specifically speaking and listening are prescribed learning outcomes for students. This addresses an important aspect of critical

pedagogy – dialogism – as students "use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of contributing to group success, discussing and comparing ideas, improving and deepening comprehension, and discussing and resolving problems" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 49). Further, the existing IRP, forwards concepts and skills such as "personal writing," "voice," and "range of purposes and audiences," which begin a path towards personalization along with prescribed learning outcomes such as "generating, selecting, developing, and organizing ideas from personal interests… and / or research" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 59). At the time of this Master of Education project, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has released new draft curriculum documents that also support the use of critical pedagogy. The draft curriculum forwards core competencies that revolve around "communication, thinking, and personal & social competencies" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013, English Language Arts, Learning Standards). Within these core competencies are interrelated aspects such as having students "connect and engage with others to share and develop ideas" in a dialogical fashion and to "acquire, interpret and present information" in an inquiry-based manner. These critical pedagogy aspects are enhanced within the 'personal and cultural' competencies section that forwards the development of "personal values and choices" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013, English Language Arts, Learning Standards). These are critical for being able to develop students' voice, to know oneself and present points of view in relation to critical personal or social issues.

In its rationale, considerations for program delivery and prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs), the existing BC ELA IRP (2006) supports the use of new literacies

practices. It acknowledges that "[T]he rapid expansion in the use of technology and media has expanded the concept of what it means to be literate" (p. 3). This rationale is expressed broadly through the "Information and communications technology," "Expanded definition of text" and "Expanded range of texts" sections of the considerations for program delivery, and more specifically through PLOs such as students will be able to "create meaningful visual representations for a variety of purposes and audiences" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 59). The new draft curriculum can also be understood to support new literacies practices. Within its 'Big ideas' is the learning standard for "creating multiple types of texts enable us to construct meaning, express ideas, think critically and creatively, and connect with others" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013, English Language Arts, Learning Standards). The new draft also forwards multimodal compositional concepts and skills such as "oral, written, visual, and digital communication forms," and to "evoke emotion and create impact" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013, English Language Arts, Learning Standards). At this time of curricular reform in our digital age, one can clearly find support as a teacher for the development and use of critical pedagogy and new literacies practices in the language and literacy classroom. In the next section I introduce how and why I have begun to transform my own teaching.

Changing My Pedagogy

During the past few years, and more specifically within the past school year with the development and implementation of my unit entitled *Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for Social Chang*e, I have significantly transformed my teaching practice. Whereas I used to draw solely from the British Columbia Ministry of

Education's curriculum as my guide for instruction, I have begun to look to my students as my first guide for curriculum design and implementation. I used to design elaborate learning tasks with similar products and outcomes for all students; perhaps with an occasional option. Now the learning tasks are more significantly selected and designed by the students. I used to teach writing by genre where student voice might follow. Now, student voice determines the genres that we explore and use. Also, during the last two years, I have started to get my students to put away their papers and pens in favour of tablets, laptops and smart phones for composition. Students are increasingly using digital and electronic tools in order to compose and share their voices, and by embracing this change, I am able to meet students where they are at and with the digital composition tools with which they are familiar. Despite being unfamiliar with digital technologies myself, I recognize the power and authenticity of digital technologies within the language and literacy classroom. The ability to publish globally, to create dynamic pieces of multimodal compositions that include music, sound effects, still or moving images, animations, stop motion, voice, text and the like can empower the today's youth with a richness and diversity of writing tools and audiences that were previously unavailable in the typical classroom. In my classroom, these digital communication and composition tools are not only commonplace, but they are also ideal for having students create works that have the potential to impact their own lives and the lives of others around them. Recently, due to changes in digital technologies and to address students' developmental and learning needs within a rapidly changing and challenged society, I have begun to transform my teaching. These changes have come at a time that I completed my graduate studies in Language and Literacy at the University of Victoria. In the final

section of this chapter, I identify the research question that guided the development and completion of this Master of Education project.

My Master of Education Project Question

I believe that students need to be engaged in writing for a real purpose, to target and perform for a real audience, to engage in writing that addresses and tries to offer solutions to the challenges of contemporary society, and that manifests new literacies practices. My project involves a critical reflection, grounded in the literature, on a writing program that I developed and recently implemented in which adolescent students composed, performed and digitally recorded spoken word poetry that has the potential to transform self and society. In my teaching, I asked myself: How can my students use spoken word poetry and digital media to be authentic writers in the 21st century to advocate for, and possibly create, social change? For this Master of Education project I ask: What are the pedagogical challenges and opportunities in creating and supporting a writing program that articulates critical pedagogies and new literacies for the potential of students' personal and social transformation?

In the next chapter I examine the relevant literature and research to better understand the two frameworks, namely critical pedagogy and New Literacies, that informed the choices I made as literacy educator along with my students. In chapter three, I reflect upon my writing program and further present a unit plan that incorporates salient aspects of both critical pedagogy and new literacies for learners including dialogism, Inquiry-based/Personalized learning, performative spoken word poetry and the use of digital technologies for transformative purposes. This project is intended as a professional

learning resource for educators who wish to explore the potential for creating social

change through the composition and digital presentation of students' spoken word poetry.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Our digital age presents many challenges and opportunities for contemporary adolescents and literacy teachers (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). Through a multitude of digital, interactive screens, students are immersed in a rapidly changing world that presents to them many personal and social challenges – from negative gender stereotypes to the various impacts of global warming. Literacy teachers are challenged to address their students' digital-based communication practices, curricular reform, and changing conceptions of teaching and learning (Nahachewsky, 2013). Yet the digital age also affords new opportunities for engaging students in authentic, interactive literacy practices and texts that are connected to a global audience. In my teaching, I have asked myself: How can my students use spoken word poetry and digital media to be authentic writers in the 21st century to advocate for, and possibly create, social change? During the past year I organized, designed and implemented a critical, digital composition unit entitled *Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for Social Chang*e in my Grade 6/7 classroom that both challenged and supported my students' understanding and composition of spoken word poetry through digital tools with the potential for personal and social transformation. In my Master of Education project, I ask: What are the pedagogical challenges and opportunities in creating and supporting a writing program that articulates critical pedagogies and new literacies practices for the potential of students' personal and social transformation?

As response to my project inquiry, in the following sections of chapter two, I outline two theoretical frameworks – critical pedagogy and New Literacies. Within these

two frameworks I further discuss salient constituent topics including critical literacy, dialogism, Inquiry-based and 21st century learning, and performance poetry. This discussion is followed by a review of current research literature exploring studies regarding the implementation of critical pedagogy and new literacies practices. These researchers inquired into writing for social change in our digital era; the potential of spoken word poetry as a form of rhetoric to develop author's voice and to interact deeply with both audience and a variety of genres of writing; how authentic Grade 4 writing experiences not only improve literacy skills, but also have the potential to effect change; and the process and benefits of dialogic classrooms. In summary, chapter two discusses the main theoretical frameworks and constituent topics that inform the organization, creation and implementation of a critical, digital composition project in a contemporary middle years English language arts classroom.

Theoretical Frameworks

There are strong theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that support the use of critical, digital composition including online performance poetry, in contemporary middle years ELA classes. Before examining the current research in a review of the literature, it is important that I define two theoretical frameworks: Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981) and New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013; Leu, et al., 2014). I begin with an examination of critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy

Historically, critical pedagogy can be understood to emerge from the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school in the late 1920's who argued that the process of schooling withholds opportunities for students to formulate their own aims, and schools

encourage a hierarchical understanding of power that undermines the kind of social consciousness needed to bring about change and transformation (Breunig, 2011). While there are many definitions of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire is generally regarded as the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy. Impacted by his work with impoverished peasants in Brazil, Freire (1970) devised a critical literacy program based on his ideal of praxis (a recursive relationship of theory, action, and reflection) to work toward social change and justice. Freire re-defined schooling's purpose to liberate learners by allowing them to discuss problems that are relevant to them, and helping them to realize that they are sources of creative, critical thinking and capable of action (Breunig, 2011).

Henry Giroux (1981) began to formulate a critical pedagogy that synthesized the student-centred progressive ideas of John Dewey's philosophy that will allow teachers to realize a classroom infused with democratic social values for personal and social change; that would challenge the legitimation and perpetuation of status quo in schooling and society. For Giroux, critical pedagogy "signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities…. Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority and power" (1994, p.30). Besley (2012) forwards Giroux's explanation of critical pedagogy as "an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action" (p. 594).

Drawing directly from the foundational work of Freire (1970) and Giroux (1981), many educational researchers, theorists and teachers have embraced critical pedagogy as a major philosophical framework within education during the past 45 years. Here, and throughout my project, I draw directly from Freire and Giroux to define critical pedagogy as awareness of the socially constructed nature of knowledge, language, texts, and human institutions (including schools) while encouraging agency, through the same, for both students and teachers to effectively change or transform those structures of power that negatively affect us. Pandya and Pagdilao (2015) support this definition of critical pedagogy as a "process of naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and shape it" (Pandya & Pagdilao, 2015, p. 39). Having established a historical background and scholarly definition of critical pedagogy – one of two theoretical frameworks that inform this Master of Education project – I will now discuss critical literacy and dialogic teaching; two key instructional strategies towards realizing critical pedagogy in the English language arts classroom

Critical literacy.

As instructional strategy, critical literacy advocates for the active reading and analysis of texts for the purposes of understanding underlying messages and relationships of power (Luke & Elkins, 1998). This approach is particularly important for literacy education within digital times. Applicable across various mediums and media, from page to screen, there are five key concepts to critical literacy: (1) all texts are constructions; (2) all texts contain belief and value messages; (3) each persona interprets messages differently; (4) texts serve different interests; and (5) each medium develops its own

'language' in order to position readers/viewers in a certain way (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, pp. 34-36).

Recalling Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, we can understand that critical literacy not only involves literacy learners' reading, interrogation and interpretation of text but also their composition of text, as students are sources of creative, critical thinking and capable of action. Such an understanding of critical literacy is supported by Aukerman (2012) who writes, "[T]o teach critical literacy is to invite students to inhabit positions of textual authority in which their work with texts is anchored in these recognitions" (p. 43). Others, such as the New London Group (1996), have also shifted critical literacy's focus from the consumption of text to the composition of text for purposes of individual and social agency. In their "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies," this collective group of literacy scholars argues that it is essential for students to design their futures. In this call, The New London group recognizes the importance using multiple modes (print, visual, oral, embodied…) of communication and various mediums (from page to digital-based screen) to help a wide variety of students realize the creative and critical thinking towards action that Freire and Giroux forward. Having defined critical literacy and identified a shift towards critical writing, I now discuss a second key approach – dialogic teaching – towards realizing critical pedagogy in the ELA classroom.

Dialogic teaching.

Freire identified problems with the traditional, institutional systems of education, being "fixed in monomodal instruction, with homogenized lesson plans, curricula and pedagogy, and that they neglect to address challenging political, cultural and ecological problems" (Kahn & Kellner, 2007, p. 442). Informed by Bakhtin's (1984) "unfinalizable

dialogue," dialogic teaching is defined as a practice that involves the use of open-ended questions, often generated by the students, in order to co-construct knowledge, transform beliefs and to level relationships of power between teacher and students in the classroom (Lyle, 2008). Simpson, Mercer and Majors (2010) argue that through dialogic teaching there is a "link between cognitive development and talk, the social construction of knowledge and the impact of context on instructional discourse…; the socio-cultural influence of talk on gender and identity formation, power relationships" (p. 2).

Dialogic teaching is practiced in sharp contrast to monologic talk and teacher-presentation which is often used in the transmission of knowledge and which may be used to elicit right and wrong answers (Lyle, 2008). Dialogic teaching "relies on questions that are 'fundamentally open or divergent,'" which creates new understandings (Reznitskaya, 2012, p. 447). Meaningful and specific feedback is used rather than judgmental, right-versus-wrong response systems developing explanations that delve into questions of *how* and *why*, not just *what*. Reznitskaya (2012) further identifies a crucial collaborative co-construction of knowledge in teaching. The benefits to this style of teaching are "improved reasoning in new contexts, deeper conceptual understanding, increased inferential comprehension of text, and enhanced quality of argumentative writing" (p.448). Aukerman suggests that dialogic engagement "is an important, largely overlooked way of teaching critical literacy" (Aukerman, 2012, p. 46). Through dialogic teaching, critical thinking will occur when "a student's own voice is structured and emerges in conversation and constant tension with multiple other voices" (Aukerman, 2012, p. 46).

This pedagogical approach opens up discussion and helps to create a power balance in the classroom. Students take on a position of greater responsibility while the teacher steps back and allows the students to discuss (Lyle, 2008). Power relations are blurred as the locus of control over the conversation shifts from that of teacher centered (in monologic classrooms) to group centered; that it is the collective responsibility of both students and teacher (Reznitskaya, 2012). "When students are given opportunities to contribute to classroom dialogues in extended and varied ways, they can explore the limits of their own understanding. At the same time they practice new ways of using language as a tool for constructing knowledge" (Alexander, 2008, p. 84). These are required skills for students to be successful in the 21st century. Having defined and explored the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and two related practices – critical literacy and dialogic teaching – in realizing that philosophy, I now turn to defining the second major theoretical framework in this project: New Literacies.

New Literacies

New Literacies has emerged as an important educational framework during the last 25 years. A term first used by Gallego and Hollingsworth in 1992 and further developed by literacy theorists including Gee (2007), Lankshear and Knobel (2007, 2013), and Leu, et al., (2014), this social cultural framework forwards that "literacy is rapidly changing and transforming as new information and communication technologies emerge and as additional discourses, social practices, and skills are required to make use of these technologies" (Leu, Forzani, Rhoads, Maykel, Kennedy & Timbrell, 2014, p.38). It is important to recognize that New Literacies requires the presence of both 'new technical stuff' and 'new ethos stuff' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007) – the use of new and

ever-changing communication technologies with an underlying sentiment that informs

beliefs and practices. As Lankshear and Knobel (2007) write, "the significance of the

new technical stuff has mainly to do with how it enables people to build and participate in

literacy practices" that are different from conventional literacies (p. 7). 'New ethos stuff'

includes changed "…values, sensibilities, norms and procedures and so on from those

that characterize conventional literacies" (Lankshear, & Knobel, 2007, p. 7).

Understandings of *new literacies* practices continues to evolve as emergent personal

forms and platforms become common use and as new skills are born of innovative ways

to communicate using new technologies within social contexts (Bomer et al., 2010;

Lankshear & Knobel, 2013; Leu et al., 2009). Therefore, Leu, et al., (2014) differentiate

between New Literacies (upper case) as being a broad and inclusive concept that

encompasses a wide variety of definitions, and new literacies (lower case) as the

dimensions in which New Literacies operate.

> New Literacies, as the broader concept, benefits from work taking place in the
>
> multiple, lowercase dimension of new literacies, where rapid changes are more
>
> easily studied and identified. When common findings across multiple, lowercase
>
> perspectives are integrated into a broader New Literacies theory, we have a set of
>
> guiding principles that are more stable over time. The greater stability of New
>
> Literacies theory may provide theoretical direction to inform research into more
>
> rapidly changing contexts at lowercase levels (p.38).

This understanding of N/new L/literacies draws from Gee's conception of *D/discourse*.

Gee (1996) differentiates between discourse (lower case d) and Discourse (upper case D)

in his work. While "discourse" refers to the verbal interactions and relationships between

speakers and listeners, "Discourse" refers to "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (Gee, 1996, p. 131). Applicable across diverse social contexts including ELA classrooms, Gee's conceptualization of D/discourse enriches understandings of N/new L/literacies. Having provided a scholarly definition of New Literacies, I will now discuss salient characteristics of new literacies practices in our digital age. These include the ubiquitous nature of Internet usage in Canada, multiple formats and modes of digital composition, worldwide audiences, online collaboration, learner motivation, and trends towards critical, digital composition.

Internet usage in Canada.

One of the principles of New Literacies is that "the Internet makes new social practices possible with technologies such as instant messaging, social networks, blogs, wikis and e-mail, among others" (Leu, et al., 2014, p.38). The New Literacies framework is particularly important for understanding changes to literacy in Canadian schools, including young people's compositional practices and products, as almost 91% of Canada's 35,0000,000 population has access to the Internet (Stats Canada, 2013), and Canadians ranked second in a world of just over 3 billion Internet users for the average number of hours (41.3 per month) that we spend online reading, viewing, gaming and writing through social media. Further, 86% of British Columbia's households have Internet access (#1 in Canada with Alberta). However there is a 'digital divide' in that only 62% of Canadians in the lowest income quartile have Internet access (Canada Internet Registration Authority, 2014). Although such statistics point to the possibility of

changing literacies, we know that the presence of new technologies does not guarantee new literacies practices in English language arts classrooms (Nahachewsky, 2013). Yet, composing digitally is understood to create "a high level of engagement" as one of the key characteristics in classrooms that use new literacies (Kist, 2012, p. 17). One of these reasons is the students' ability to represent their learning and work in multiple formats and multiple modes (Kist, 2012).

Multiple media and multiple modes of digital composition.

The wide variety of digital communication technologies, from smart phones to tablets, allows adolescents to choose personally meaningful ways to engage in communication and learning. As multiple media types are available to the student, each can choose a platform that he or she finds both engaging and useful to fulfill the purpose of the learning task (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). For example, in using an iPad, students have access to a wealth of applications that can allow them to learn through creative means of expression. Musical students may decide to use BeatMaker™ or GarageBand™ to compose an original song. Social kinaesthetic students may choose to collaborate to compose a video that enables them to express themselves. Visual artists may enjoy producing vivid images using Paper™, Smart Drawings™ or iDraw™. Writers may choose to compose using GoogleDocs™ and upload to a FanFiction™ site. In geography, learners may create scavenger hunts, find or blaze trails through the Geocaching™ app. As a result of the breadth of platforms and forms, new literacies practices have afforded adolescents to engage in writing, to be able to publish their experiences and ideas in multiple modalities for a variety of authentic purposes and to genuine audiences. They can compose and send texts, post to FaceBook™, create stories for FanFiction™ readers,

create original music to share through iTunes™, post multimodal blog entries of their travels to RSS subscribers, and upload videos to YouTube™ to share with the whole world.

Worldwide audiences.

The Internet and new literacies allow contemporary learners to use the connected world as their audience, as students "conceive of audience as a potentially cosmopolitanising force that disposes designers to a broad, even global, viewership" (Pandya & Pagdilao, 2015, p. 39). Authorship has arguably never been as accessible to so many, as adolescents can compose and communicate fluently with audiences that can be halfway around the physical world. "Distributed effort and the ability to communicate with others across distance, cultures, and language matters" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013, p. 99). Such audiences provide an authenticity for students' compositions. As students speak, inquire, write, and create, they seek authenticity, and purpose for their voice to emerge. Authenticity is crucial in all aspects of the learning experience, including questions or problems to solve, learning task, product, audience, and mode. In Inquiry-based learning, students need to discuss authentic issues and come up with authentic questions and inquiry tasks that "connect to relevant, real-world concepts and events" (Sekeres, Coiro, Castek & Guzniczak, 2014, p. 45). Edward-Groves (2011) highlights in that students need to explore tasks that have authentic audiences and purposes, and she draws attention to new literacies and multimodalities being a key way that those goals can be attained. Through the multimodal writing, students are able to explore real tasks and connect to a real audience for a real purpose. They can also create these compositions for authentic world-wide audiences in collaboration with others.

Online collaboration.

Composing with new literacies holds many collaborative opportunities. While not all digital compositions need to be constructed collaboratively, multiple platforms and modalities allow for the co-construction of learning and product. Edward-Groves (2011) finds that new literacies provide rich collaborative experiences that are enjoyable for students. Students reported that they were able to recognize how "new interactive practices influence learning" (p. 57) and that success was linked to collaboration (Edward-Groves, 2011). In traditional literacies, the "print-privileged workshop paradigm" (Husbye et al., 2012, p. 85), students are encouraged to work independently of others, creating intellectual works that "progress towards a publishing-industry model of independent intellectual property and creative production… juxtaposed with a digital text production process like filmmaking (in which) collaborative, collective meaning-making experiences are emphasized and improvisation and connectivity are valued more than individual production" (Husbye et al., 2012, p. 85). These collaborative learning tasks establish new literacies education as a means of creating opportunities to develop collaborative skills through shared work.

Because new literacies can be collaborative, students are able to apply their strengths and do not have to excel at all facets of the learning task to be part of a successful experience. As Gee and Hayes (2011) state, "often outcomes are richer when young people bring different bits and pieces of knowledge and know-how to collaborative efforts" (p. 99). Rather than expecting the same product from every student, as may be demanded in a traditional education system, students can contribute by learning in personalized and critically informed ways.

Trends toward critical, digital literacies.

Composing digitally is powerful. New literacies use the tools of the time, and allow for creativity and expression to real audiences for real purposes. Developing new literacies helps students to focus on their strengths in collaborative ways, making connections both locally and globally via the Internet. Furthermore, it develops skills that will prepare students for the unpredictable and ever-changing future (Prensky, 2012). As students embrace the collaborative and creative multi-modal approach of new literacies, they are also tending to compose critically. Kahn and Kellner (2007) argue that "all cultures which now confront an ever evolving and expanding global media culture have a responsibility to utilize new technologies with a critical curiosity" and that they must be "committed to a pedagogy that both rigorously interrogates technology's more oppressive aspects… to foster reconstruction of the social, political, economic and cultural problems that people face" (p. 437). It is not enough simply to use technology in classrooms; education focused on the critical and transformative potential of the use of technology is essential in addressing the social issues of today. Critical digital literacies place children as authorities who will "pose and solve a variety of problems" (Pandya & Pagdilao, 2015, p. 44). This resonates with Freire's concept of problem-posing method of education that is in opposition to his banking model, in which students ingest knowledge rather than become the creators and discoverers of it (Freire, 1970). By posing questions and inquiring into problems, students develop a sense of themselves and their position in regards to the issues explored. This forms identity, a crucial element of Freire's critical pedagogy. Furthermore, through critical digital literacies, students will "examine and critique discourses that relate to wider social issues, power relationships, prejudices or

inequities" (Merchant, 2007, p. 125). Connecting to the world, seeing the world, understanding the world, and changing the world is all made possible through digital technologies.

As digital technologies and access to the Internet become more affordable, they are becoming accessible to the masses, both privileged and marginalized, and this is creating opportunities to speak out and make change. Gainer (2012) argues that "these technological tools can be empowering because they allow ordinary, often marginalized, people to become producers of culture" (p. 15).

As we move towards a critical digital literacy program, we need to understand that the potential for transformation is evident, and it needs to be taught as well as the digital and technical skills. "Although the skills are important, they cannot stand alone. Less attention has been paid to critical literacies associated with multimodal production and consumption" (Gainer, 2012, p. 15). Thomas (2011) agrees: "digital literacy is not about the tools, but about our thinking, and thinking critically about the texts that shape our identities, our lives and our culture" (p. 91). A balance, then, between teaching digital skills and critical activist skills is required for critical digital literacies education to succeed, as it will then be teaching the principles of democracy (Gainer, 2012).

Using critical, digital composition in the classrooms draws together many of the important overarching concepts that promote egalitarianism and support democracy. Kellner and Share (2007) explain that when teaching with technology "moves beyond technical production skills… and is steeped in cultural studies and critical pedagogy that addresses issues of gender, race, class, and power, it holds dramatic potential for transformative critical media literacy" (p. 61). Problem posing, dialogism, personal

inquiries, collaborative digital production are all powerful components in today's education of students that combine towards Freire's praxis: the transformation of society through critical reflection and critical action (Freire, 1970).

The above sections examined salient characteristics of new literacies practices within N/new L/literacies framework. These include the ubiquitous nature of Internet usage in Canada, multiple formats and modes of digital composition, worldwide audiences, online collaboration, learner motivation, and trends towards critical, digital composition.

In the next section I discuss the development and importance of performance poetry in digital times.

Performance Poetry

One literary genre that holds significant value to students that may have the potential not only to develop new literacy skills, but also to impact the world critically and positively, is spoken word poetry. Spoken word poetry, often called slam poetry, is a form of oracy that is increasing in popularity (Maddalena, 2009). It combines writing and performing with a purpose for an audience, making spoken word authentic and meaningful, and it allows for the poet's voice to be heard. Common themes of spoken word that emerge are personal expression, emotional healing, cultural oppression and liberation, and identity (Alvarez & Mearns, 2014). As such, it lends itself well to use in critical, digital literacy, challenging the Discourse of the privileged and celebrating the Discourse of the marginalized (Gee, 1989). Furthermore, being performative in nature, spoken word poetry has visual and auditory components, two powerful modalities that can be captured digitally.

As a form of poetry, spoken word reduces the pressures that other forms of writing place on students to attend to formal grammatical conventions and language use. Because spoken word embraces the cultural language and discourses of the marginalized, it is closely akin to hip hop culture, some may say an outgrowth of hip hop (Fields, 2013). This allows student writers to focus on meaning rather than conventions and develops student voice, which may include transforming one's identity or explore questions of power in society. "Under a critical literacy approach, text is laden with opportunities to interrogate existing subjectivities internally and externally" (Barrett, 2011, p. 45).

Spoken word poetry, itself, is a target of opposition. It is viewed in some circles of traditional academia as being "poor poetry" and to some not considered poetry at all (Parmar & Bain, 2007, p. 134). With origins in African oral traditions, spoken word, Parmar and Bain (2007) argue, is often denigrated, and is another example of a class-based value system pushing a subculture down. Yet, it may be that underground appeal that allows spoken word and hip hop culture to thrive as it appeals to the marginalized and their sympathizers (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Furthermore, African culture is by no means the only culture that has an oral tradition of stories and poetry, as oral traditions exist in virtually every culture around the globe (Parmar & Bain, 2007), and this world-wide affiliation allows students to make personalized connections to spoken word from their own cultural origins. Students enjoy the freedom of spoken word and the encouragement to question critically and even attack social norms (Barrett, 2011). They embrace the power and validation that it gives them (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Spoken word celebrates their origins and allows them to fight for justice through activism (Williams,

2015). Spoken word offers many students opportunities to engage in developing their own voices.

Spoken word poetry can make many digital connections for learning. Williams (2015) reveals how such programs as Brave New Voices™, a spoken word feature on HBO™ that highlights youth original spoken word that is often critical in nature and performed for a live audience. These productions are also available on YouTube™ now, some with millions of views. Students find the combination of spoken word and digitization powerful and relevant, as they strive to create change in our world through their personal voice in fighting for equality. Parmar and Bain (2007) call spoken word "poetry of the oppressed, pedagogy of the urban lyricist," (p. 153) and now with the capabilities of digital technologies for everyone to speak to anyone, and the appeal this genre has to youth, spoken word poetry may be a vehicle for the potential transformation of self and society in the 21st century. Understanding the potential of spoken word poetry as a form of critical, digital composition, I now examine the role of Personalized learning and Inquiry-based learning for contemporary adolescents.

Personalized Learning

Emerging in recent years is the notion that education needs to be personalized to suit the needs of every individual student. This is called Personalized learning (PL). Shaw, Larson and Sibdari (2014) reacted against the notion of "one size fits all" education system, and argued that "customizing" education to the needs of the individual is even more important than how we customize the shoes or the jeans that we wear (Shaw, Larson & Sibdari, 2014). They explain that we need a system of education that attends to and develops both the strengths and the weaknesses of individuals through an

education that is custom fit to the learning style of the individual and "allows each student to move at her preferred pace and through different learning paths" (Shaw et al., 2014, p. 1190). Boyer and Crippen (2014) agree, acclaiming the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2013) new curricular documents for how they propose "personalized learning for every student… [with]… flexibility and choice" (p. 343).

Boyer and Crippen (2014) continue by discussing the connections between 21st century learning, digital technologies, competency and content based learning, high standards, and Personalized learning. In these connections, Boyer and Crippen (2014) identify that Personalized learning is founded on the principles that:

1. Learning requires the active participation of the student,

2. People learn in a variety of different ways and at different rates,

3. Learning is both an individual and group process, and

4. Learning is most effective when students reflect on the process of learning and set goals for improvement. (p. 346)

Thus, it appears that at the core PL is student-centred; and interests and passions are focal points for engagement and increasing motivation (Boyer & Crippen, 2014; Childress & Benson, 2014; Shaw et al., 2014). Furthermore, it addresses student need by being flexible in its form, yet with high standards (Boyer & Crippen, 2014).

Personalized learning revolves education around the needs of the student and helps to empower the student. As such, the student is not a receptacle of information as might be found in a traditional system, or what Freire termed a banking system of education (1970) in which information is simply poured into the student. In Personalized learning, "student learning experiences – what they learn, and how, when, and where they

learn it – are tailored to their individual needs, skills, and interests, and that their school enables them to take ownership of their own learning" (Childress & Benson, 2014, p. 33). This ownership over a student's own learning connects directly to 21st century goals such as responsibility and leadership, core competencies that the British Columbia Ministry of Education is looking at targeting in their new draft curricula documents, and resonates with the theory that students will learn more broadly and deeply when they are invested in the activity. Furthermore, "when done well, personalized learning can meet all students where they are, motivate them based on their interests and academic level, accelerate their learning, and prepare them to become true lifelong learners" (Childress & Benson, 2014, p. 33).

Coe (2009), professor at Durham University, questions the effectiveness of PL. He questions the validity of the research in favour of personalized or individualized instruction, and certainly Freire, himself, would not agree to embracing action without critical thought. Coe is adamant that many of the changes to our education system have been reactionary and not founded on empirical evidence (Coe, 2009). Furthermore, he suggests that improving the rigor of a traditional system of education may have more benefits (Coe, 2009). This view however, does not have much support within the academic community.

Childress and Benson (2014) cite research regarding Personalized learning, and while the bias of this particular study should be noted due to the financial and political affiliations of the RAND Corporation, this research does acknowledge the benefits of PL. Students begin to take ownership and responsibility over their learning when they realize the personal and intrinsic value that learning this way has for them. Deep connections to

content and process allow students to learn deeply and with passion. Motivation is high, and with that, achievement increases. Attendance at schools improves, as does student behaviour. Furthermore, graduation rates rise. By embracing PL, students learn critical skills of goal setting, perseverance, overcoming challenges, resourcefulness and creativity, skills necessary for being successful in today's ever-changing world. A second model of learning is also being forwarded in contemporary digital times; Inquiry-based learning.

Inquiry-based Learning

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is defined by educators and experts in a variety of ways. Bacon and Matthews (2014) describe IBL:

> as the ways in which curious learners actively and seriously engage with the social and physical environment in a questioning and critical effort to make sense of the world, and the consequent reflection, in community, on the connections between the experiences encountered and the information gathered, leading to thoughtful action (p. 352).

Kuhlthau, Maniotes and Caspari (2007) describe IBL as "an approach to learning whereby students find and use a variety of sources of information and ideas to increase their understanding of a problem, topic, or issue…. It espouses investigation, exploration, research, pursuit, and study" (Kulthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2007, p. 2). Harvey and Daniels describe IBL as "problem or question driven; it encourages collaboration; it makes kids into explorers and discoverers; it requires kids to think; and it puts teachers in nonconventional roles" (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p 56).

While some objectors to IBL reject it on the premise that IBL lacks structure and guidance, Bruce and Casey (2012), through their research and synthesis of IBL, have developed a flexible system of implementation of IBL that synthesizes the important aspects of IBL that offer that guidance and support. Their cyclic system focuses on asking effective questions that revolve around real problems, investigating solutions to those problems, gathering evidence, drawing conclusions, and reflecting with action (Bruce & Casey, 2012). They also suggest guiding principles to help facilitate and manage the learning. These include ensuring that students are engaged in a sustained manner in developmentally appropriate tasks, allowing for ongoing asking of old and new questions, approaching the tasks systematically, using social collaboration, and varying the types of assessments that are applied to each individual learner (Bruce & Casey, 2012).

Building off students' interests and personal goals, IBL has students examine topics and find personal connections from which they will springboard off and inquire into asking specific and key questions that do not usually have a definitive answer (Alberta Education, 2004). Frequently, these are questions that often prompt further questions. IBL "refers to student-centered ways of teaching in which students raise questions, explore situations, and develop their own ways towards solutions" (Maaß & Artigue, 2013, p. 780). This student-centred approach is characterized by student created questions, responses and explanations are based on evidence, explanations are connected to prior knowledge and students communicate and justify their responses (Maaß & Artigue, 2013). This authentic approach to learning generates deep learning through meaningful questions and investigations.

Egan (2015) describes an educated person as having learned both breadth of learning, or in other words has a wide knowledge-base, and depth of learning, understanding complex applications and connections of knowledge that are beyond the superficiality that merely broad learning provides. Roberts (2011) explains, "Deep learning, then, is learning that has meaning for the learner and therefore stays with the learner" (p. 7). Finally Elder and Paul (2012) explain deep thinking as a process in which students progress from knowing the basic principles of a given subject to developing an in-depth understanding of the complex concepts of that subject. By connecting these three concepts, of complexity and personalization of knowledge, that goes well beyond a superficial collection of information and includes both a grasp of basic principles of the subject and complex understandings, we can understand deep learning within IBL.

Inquiry-based learning has significant educational value. IBL "can be used as an approach that can ignite critical thinking and improve students' achievement" (Kitot, Ahmad, Seman, 2010, p. 265). Levy, Thomas, Drago and Rex (2013) state that there exists "a growing body of research indicating that providing learners with opportunities to inquire into authentic problems can substantially enhance their understanding" (p. 387). The recent studies conducted by these researchers on IBL lend compelling evidence to the argument to this 21st century learning process. Kitot et al. (2010) find that there is a powerful and meaningful impact on students' ability to think critically through Inquiry-based learning, that "Inquiry learning requires a higher order thinking which will promote a higher level of students' critical thinking" (Kitot et al., 2010, p. 272). Levy et al. (2013) state that "IBL has the potential to foster greater interdisciplinarity, thus broadening and deepening student understanding about the similarities and differences among fields" (p.

405). The research continues to validate the process of IBL, as greater depth and breadth of learning has been found to result from Inquiry-based learning.

Both Personalized learning and Inquiry-based learning require a student's personal investment, and this creates greater ownership of the learning for the student. Their effect authenticity of the learning, the personal and deeply meaningful nature of the experiences, the transferability of the problems being solved to real world issues, the development of critical thinking skills, and depth and breadth of the learning across disciplines. Such approaches to learning within critical pedagogy and New Literacies frameworks impact adolescent learners' identity formation. Gee (2000) defines identity as being recognized as "a certain 'kind of person,' in a given context" (p. 99). One facet of his theory explains that these identities are "connected… to their performances in society," and thus if a student is actively contributing to the betterment of society, a positive self-identity will be developed as a peer-contributor, social activist or defender of justice (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Such understandings are important to the realization of a critical, digital composition unit as the one that I organized, created and implemented for my Master of Education project.

In the previous sections of chapter two, I defined the two theoretical frameworks – critical pedagogy and New Literacies – for my Master of Education project. Within these two frameworks I further discuss salient constituent topics including critical literacy, dialogism, Inquiry-based and Personalized learning, and performance poetry. In the following section I present a review of current research literature exploring studies regarding the implementation of critical pedagogy and new literacies.

Review of the research literature

In the following section, I examine the research literature pertaining to critical pedagogy and New Literacies in our digital times, particularly in relation to students' critical, digital compositions. These include the following studies: Kesler (2013) who examined writing for social change in our digital era; Scarbrough and Allen (2014) who explored the potential of spoken word poetry as a form of rhetoric to develop author's voice and to interact deeply with both audience and a variety of genres of writing; Gatto (2013) who examined how authentic Grade 4 writing experiences not only improve literacy skills, but also has the potential to effect change; and Boyd and Markarian (2011) who studied the process and benefits of dialogic classrooms.

Kesler (2013) examines writing for social change in our digital era, exploring the research question, "how did designing multimodal texts inform my pre-service students' understandings of social justice issues?" (p. 284). Thus, through a 13-month pre-service literacy program in a Northeast public college, Kesler focused on the work of two pre-service students that exemplified "the range of topics, audience, purpose, and genre" (p. 286) that represented the cohort and utilized diverse content and mode of presentation. The data examined included final critical digital products, reflections, interviews, notes, outlines and plans in addition to field notes. This case study used grounded theory in its analysis of the data to generate codes that were triangulated and analyzed for themes.

What Kesler (2013) found was that "designing multimodal texts informs [students'] understandings of social justice issues" (p. 282). Both students, through a project-based and inquiry-based approach, explored and played with modality adding, changing, deleting, redrafting, shifting and embracing new experiences in order to

develop a more comprehensive understanding of the social issues, and to develop their knowledge and skills of digital literacy. With a strong focus on purpose and audience throughout the projects, the two subjects of the research were able to blend genres creatively through the digital form that may not have been as easily done through traditional texts. Furthermore, the digital platforms brought authenticity into the picture, of both audience and purpose. There is a "convergence of multimodality and social action writing" (Kesler, 2013, p. 293). Kesler (2013), through connecting critical pedagogy with digital forms in "an exploratory, problem-solving stance towards writing" (p. 294) demonstrates how important aspects such as participation, collaboration, and creative modalities of intentional expression are developed in students. "Thus, social action writing projects can make people more responsible citizens as they compose multimodally and use digital technologies" (Kesler, 2013, p. 294) lending credence to the notion that critical digital literacies should be taught to students.

Scarbrough and Allen (2014) explored the potential of spoken word poetry as a form of rhetoric to develop author's voice and to interact deeply with both audience and a variety of genres of writing. This qualitative ethnographic case study explored two educators' method of using writer's workshop around a spoken word poetry unit that focused on authenticity and collaboration in a critical pedagogy framework. The study focused on 22 Grade 12 students in an English classroom in a mid-sized city in the Northeast America; including 17 females and 5 males; 10 African American students, 10 White students, and 2 Latino/a students; with about a third of the student population having had some experience with spoken word poetry. Data was collected over four weeks and was comprised of observations; videos of the lessons, rehearsals, and the

poetry slam event; interviews; and written exhibits such as texts, writing journals, drafts in progress, and copies of the final copies. Using an inductive, grounded theory approach, the study looked for categories that characterized the design of the unit. In addition, the study focused on the conflicts or dilemmas of the class. The study explored the questions: [H]ow can traditional workshop pedagogy and a pedagogy on the social and cultural situatedness of literacy both align; how can the writer shape rhetorical and political text and message for an authentic audience; and what roles should students and teachers play in the development of student writing?

The authors began by looking at traditional workshop formats, showing both the advocacy for and the argument against them. They acknowledge that experts such as Atwell, Calkins, and Graves have claimed tremendous benefits of writer's workshop including "giving students choice over topics, genres, and audiences for their writing; and renegotiating student and teacher roles to support students' independent writing processes" (Scarbrough & Allen, 2014, p 476). However, there is some evidence that suggests students previously exposed to and successful in the traditional writing forms will succeed while those whose experience differs will be marginalized by being placed at a significant disadvantage, and that traditional workshop writing formats do not address authentic audiences and genres chosen by the author (Scarbrough & Allen, 2014). Thus, the traditional writer's workshop needs to be redefined and restructured in order to address these critiques. This case study examines how two teachers redesigned the writer's workshop to do this.

What the study found was threefold. First, grounding the writer's workshop in critical literacy and using a discursive and dialogic classroom community, a teacher is

able to merge both traditional and emergent theories in the writer's workshop (Scarbrough & Allen, 2014). Second, because of the importance and inclusion of an authentic audience in the genre, spoken word poetry makes the writer speak out as an agent of change (Scarbrough & Allen, 2014). Third, by exploring political and social conflict in a dialogic and discursive community, teachers and students both supported each other and argued against each other, thereby helping with the writing process as well as helping to develop conviction in the rhetoric (Scarbrough & Allen, 2014). These findings are important, as they show that spoken word has potential in the classroom, but also that the writer's workshop can be adapted to the authentic needs of today's writers engaging with today's issues.

Gatto's three year ethnographic study of twenty-two Grade 4 classmates demonstrated how authentic writing experiences not only improve literacy skills, but also had the potential to effect change (Gatto, 2013). The study focused on subjects in a western city in New York with the 11th highest rate of child poverty in America in which 89% of students received free or subsidized lunches and live in low-income areas and only 52% of students graduate (Gatto, 2013). "Critical literacy focuses on the construction of social relations, identity, knowledge, and power through text" (Gatto, 2013, p. 242) and these experiences shaped realities through careful and critical action. These students were engaged in "unpacking the relationship between power and language by asking complex questions about race relations, resource inequities, and institutional politics, and then designing a new text in order to change their social future" (Gatto, 2013, p. 242). Essentially, engaging in critical discourse by examining the inequities of social status, whether due to race, economics or other forms of privilege, allowed these

students to create the knowledge and language to compose text that transformed their realities. By speaking up and out in a critically informed manner, the students were able to make the statement that as humans they had the right to healthy quality food as part of their lunch program, and their collective critical writing effected their desired outcome.

A study on dialogic teaching by Boyd and Markarian (2011) elucidated the process and benefits of dialogic classrooms, though the subject of the study approaches teaching through a dialogic stance rather than simply dialogic talk (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). In this micro-analysis, the study focused on a single teacher's position towards creating a dialogic classroom and examined his approach towards and conducting of deep and meaningful conversations. The study focused on a seven-minute excerpt from one weekly morning meeting that a teacher engaged in with eighteen Grade 3 students in a small college town in central New York State. The research looked at "decision making for patterns of talk… and content of talk… to illuminate instructional stance" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 524). While the teacher in the study used both open and closed questions, students engaged in a rich sequence of dialogue that included listening, sharing, collaborating and considering (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). When examined in context, the subject's dialogic approach elicited elaborate and lengthy responses from individual students as they 're-voiced' or clarified, built from others' ideas, interconnected tangential concepts, redirected talk to being useful and productive, developed depth of concept attainment, offered specific and constructive feedback and engaged enthusiastically, posed genuine and purposeful questions and demonstrated ways to transition from one speaker to another or one topic to another (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Students shared authority of the conversations in many ways and felt empowered

by the experience. While the dialogic stance can be seen as a more inclusive approach than dialogic talk, the creation of the dialogic classroom allowed students opportunities to work together to build knowledge in a rich co-led critical learning environment that values the students' voices and ideas. While students were questioned, topics were challenged, and the environment was seen "not as a face-threatening act but rather as evidence of intimacy – trust and solidarity" as the students worked together to achieve greater understandings through a shared teaching, dialogic approach (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 530).

> What makes [dialogic teaching] so powerful, then, is that by listening and providing space for student voices, the teacher can have a far greater awareness of his or her students' everyday knowledge, and this awareness may allow him or her… to harness, scaffold, and guide the foreknowledge required for a particular lesson much more effectively" (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, p. 521).

What can be determined from the research literature is that the benefits of dialogic teaching can be transferrable to critical literacy lessons. As students begin to question deeply and discuss issues that require transformation, as students begin to take ownership of their learning and of the inequities of society, dialogic teaching becomes a vital tool in the open discussion of critical topics. Students may begin to deepen their understandings of what needs to change and how they can be changed. Furthermore, as co-constructors of knowledge, many students may feel a bond with other classmates that could encourage them to collaborate on potentially transformational actions. Students think more critically and question more openly, as they strive for deeper learning and embrace the power they are given in dialogic classrooms. Having students operate as collaborators towards

common goals is a way of developing collective consciousness that empowers its participants and enriches the discussions. As Aukerman suggests, critical literacy as diologic engagement is a powerful act, as it brings students into highly relevant and personal state of mind through the establishment of a deeply meaningful learning environment (Aukerman, 2012). Kellner and Share (2007) argue that critical literacy "is crucial for participatory democracy in the twenty-first century, and that the only progressive option that exists is how to teach it, not whether to teach it" (p. 59). Dialogic teaching moves students to action to bring injustices and imbalances into a state of equity through personal connection and empowerment. It creates an environment conducive to critical pedagogy through valuing talking and listening, questioning and validating, and establishes trust and respect within the learning group. These are qualities that develop intrinsic value in the learning and can motivate students to ask engaging, critical questions that are personally relevant that the student will seek to answer, leading to Inquiry-based learning and Personalized learning.

In the chapter above, I outlined two theoretical frameworks – critical pedagogy and New Literacies – and salient constituent topics that informed the choices I made as literacy educator in the design and implementation of a unit for my Grade 6/7 ELA class. A review of current research literature explored four studies related to the implementation of such critical pedagogy and new literacies practices. In the following chapter, I present a critical reflection on the organization, design and implementation of a compositional unit that manifests a transformation in my approach to teaching language and literacy in our digital age.

Chapter 3

Presentation of my Master of Education Project

Introduction

In this final chapter, I discuss my Master of Education project that consists of a critically informed reflection on a unit entitled *Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for Social Chang*e. I created and taught this unit in English language arts to my Grade 6/7 class during the past school year, 2014-15. When organizing, designing and implementing this unit, I asked myself: "How can my students use spoken word poetry and digital media to be authentic writers in the 21st century to advocate for, and possibly create, social change?" This final chapter, as well as the accompanying Unit Plan and student hand-outs that I created and include as Appendices A, B and C at the end of this project, are intended as a professional learning resource for educators who wish to explore the potential for creating social change through the composition and digital presentation of students' spoken word poetry.

Within this chapter, then, I provide details on my experiences organizing, designing and implementing this critical, digital composition unit. Woven throughout this reflection are references to the literature reviewed in the previous chapter in response to my research question: What are the pedagogical challenges and opportunities in creating and supporting a writing program that articulates critical pedagogies and New Literacies for the potential of students' personal and social transformation? In particular I examined the literature regarding this project's two main frameworks – critical pedagogy and New Literacies – and key constitutive concepts including critical literacy, dialogic teaching, Inquiry-based learning, Personalized learning, and performance poetry. In addition, I

make direct connections between the unit's learning activities and the British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2013) new draft curricular document's Core Competencies and Big Ideas.

This chapter is organized as a reflection on each of the six phases that comprised the unit, namely: (1) Exposure to and dialogue about social issues; (2) Inquiry into issues that require social transformation; (3) Learning spoken word poetry; (4) Digital video composition; (5) Performance night; and (6) Taking a stand. These sections include my considerations of how the unit can be implemented effectively in a student-centered manner, and why helping students to learn how to compose poetry for critically informed social action in a digital world is important to their literacy learning and development of self-identity. Further, in this chapter, I also include examples of student and teacher generated Inquiry-based learning questions, questions that could be used during writer's workshop, and a pastiche or re-construction of four examples of a student-generated poem. These serve as exemplars of the type of work that teachers and students can do within this unit. First, I begin this critical reflection on my unit with a discussion of my past year's teaching context.

Contextualizing the project.

During the last few years, I have been evolving my teaching practice by encouraging my students to engage deeply, invest themselves in their education, and take risks in their learning. I have worked to embrace new technologies and new literacies. Furthermore, having been influenced by the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire, I have transformed my pedagogy to focus on the learning needs and desires of my students while emphasizing that teachers and students should act – to be the change that the world

needs to overcome injustice and inequity (Freire, 1970). Consequently, much of my language and literacy program requires students to advocate, through multiple modes and genres of composition, for what they believe needs to happen in order to help make our world more egalitarian and harmonious.

This past year, I taught a Grade 6/7 class in the regular English stream of my school which is located on an island off the West Coast of British Columbia. At this school, nearly 50% of the student population enters the French immersion program. The effect of this school structure is that the majority of special needs students and students with behavioral challenges are placed into crowded English classrooms. The amount of support for these students with special learning and behavioral needs at our school has diminished during my teaching career. In this way, the students are arguably being marginalized in their education. In my own Grade 6/7 English language arts (ELA) class during the past year, I had twenty-five students including three individuals with designated special needs, and two English language learner students. In addition, I had 12 students who struggled in other ways with their learning. This complex class composition problem consistently manifested itself in the classroom as behavioral challenges. Yet, I understood that all of my students were looking to create successful learning experiences, searching for a positive academic identity, and intent on making positive changes within their local community or the broader society. The unit (see Appendix A) that I created and present in this project offered many of these students those developmental and transformative opportunities.

I implemented the unit with my 6/7 class during ELA class-time over the span of three and a half months. This timeframe included a break during which a pre-service

teacher assigned to my classroom was conducting her five-week practicum. Ideally, I would have spent two continuous months on this unit. My students largely embraced the objectives and activities within this unit. Through both my teaching experiences and review of the literature, I have come to understand that this unit offered students relevancy and meaningfulness; used digital tools and developed digital skills; allowed students choice; encouraged students' thoughts and words to be valued and honoured; demonstrated that creating a socially informed or political statement was potentially empowering and rewarding; and helped students to forge a positive self-identity through their critical literacy and digital practices. Each stage, or phase, of this unit is flexible in that it can be taught in a variety of ways, though student-centered learning is at the core of this unit. Although we operated as a community of learners, no one was held back or left behind in his or her own personal literacy learning journey. The unit's digital skills, ELA concepts, and personal growth can be learned individually or collaboratively. Due to the personalized nature of the unit, each student was encouraged to become as involved in each of the unit's phases as he or she was cognitively and developmentally ready to do so. Having now established the organizational context for this unit, I move to a critically informed discussion and explanation of the design and implementation of the unit's six phases.

Phase 1 – Exposure to and dialogue about social issues

This unit began as a *Morning Media Moment* (Appendix B), a thirty-minute block of time twice per week during which the students would watch a video that focused on a social issue. Some of the topics that could be introduced to a class for this activity include the objectification of women, bullying, racism, homophobia, and pollution. I asked my

students for ideas, and they let me know what they thought were key social issues that were important to them. On several occasions, students would ask to share a video and host the discussion instead of me. When this happened, it was a turning point. Students began to look within themselves and to each other to direct the course of learning and action; to make choices for themselves and their learning. Freire (1970) writes of this as learner-ownership. Such understanding and action is also an articulation of Personalized learning approaches (Childress & Benson, 2014).

Students would view their video choice and then hold a discussion that was facilitated by me. This was an opportunity to engage in dialogism (Freire, 1970; Reznitskaya, 2012, Simpson et al., 2010), and have the students learn to develop understandings of foundational concepts such as marginalization, oppression, objectification, and to explore the effects of power imbalances; all of which are key concepts in critical pedagogy (Kahn & Kellner, 2007). The *Morning Media Moment* discussions would revolve around three key concepts that I used as a model of engaging the students in critical thinking:

1. Big Ideas

2. Questions

3. Comments and Connections

As the facilitator of the discussion, I would verbally prompt students with the structures that we would use to hold class discussions, speaking openly if their thought or question was directly connected to the topic and raising a hand to be put on a speaker's list if many people had contributions to make. I also reminded them of their roles as speaker's list manager, generators of questions, synthesizers of information and opinions, active and engaged listeners. At times I could also prompt them with open-ended, higher order

questions that required responses beyond superficial recall of information when they needed a little encouragement. My hope as teacher was that by exposing them to this technique, the students would begin to take over the conversations with thought-provoking questions of their own – and within a few days they did.

Earlier in the school year I had established with my students what dialogic teaching, or conducting a dialogic classroom involved. They understood, for this unit, that they needed to contribute to the collective deepening of understanding through higher order and critical consideration of the issues presented and by asking questions that required that students assess, evaluate, synthesize, question and justify ideas. As I asked fundamentally open or divergent questions (Reznitskaya, 2012) such as, "So, what do you think?" students would start to identify the big ideas presented in the video. As a whole class, they would ask questions for clarification, or ask someone else what they thought. The students would verbalize connections to their own experiences and prior knowledge and make comments of their own related to the video. Open discussion ensued, and those deep questions, the kind that move well beyond superficial recall into promoting critical and creative higher order thinking, began to emerge. This approach not only manifested dialogic teaching's focus on higher-order, student-generated questioning but also critical pedagogy's broader project of guiding by passion and principle (Besley, 2012; Giroux, 1981).

The dialogic approach within this unit is important for many reasons. These *Morning Media Moments* allowed students to learn how to collaborate as a community of learners; co-constructing knowledge and delving deeply into learning, sometimes through the dissonance and tension of differing opinions which Aukerman (2012) identifies as a

key component for dialogism. This involvement in and ownership over the classroom discussions empowers students, authenticates their voices, and gives them a sense of understanding their world and their role in it. This authentic process is fundamental in personalizing learning experiences (Hathaway & Jaquith, 2014) and critical pedagogy (Pandya & Pagdilao, 2015).

As this dialogue develops, students start to participate in many ways. Some simply listen and process everything that is being presented. Others ask "good questions" (Simpson et al., 2010, p. 1) which may include provocative or clarifying questions, or they share personal connections. Still other students will offer counterpoints and alternate views. In my experience, as students engage and take ownership of the classroom discussion, the quality and quantity of their learning experience increases dramatically.

This first phase – Exposure to and dialogue about social issues – is crucial to the establishment of critical pedagogy. Giroux's explanation of critical pedagogy is "an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action" (2010, as cited in Besley, 2012, p. 594). We can see that by engaging in dialogism around issues that students feel are pertinent, the elements of passion, consciousness, recognition, and connection are evoked. This phase is the beginning of taking action. It is Freire's 'thoughtful' and 'critically reflective' stage that will later in the unit be combined with student 'action' to form 'praxis;' the key to potential transformation (Freire, 1970).

In this section, we have examined Phase 1 of the unit on critical, digital composition, using student-centered dialogue to explore social issues that the students

find relevant. This phase has strong connections to Gee's Discourse (1989), Freire's dialogism (1970), and the development of a positive self-identity that Mariano and Going (2011) have discussed as being crucial to adolescent development. This phase begins to develop a culture of co-learning and investment, ownership and respectful discussion.

From the literature we further understand that "dialogic discourse offers opportunities for learning of a kind that is not generally supported by monologic discourse…" and that "dialogic discourse connotes social relationships of equal status, intellectual openness, and possibilities for critique and creative thought" (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007, pp. 276-277). This phase of the unit is therefore designed to lead to students towards taking "a more inquiry-based approach to the topic and work to generate their own evidence and reasoning" (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007, p. 278). In the next section, I discuss the second phase of the unit, the "Inquiry and Personalized learning" phase that motivates students to pursue personally meaningful issues into which they can delve with critical and analytical depth through the process of inquiry.

Phase 2 – Inquiry into issues that require social transformation

In Phase 2, students begin to make some personal choices regarding what they want to explore for the remainder of the unit. Having recently been exposed to several different social issues, possibly even having led the class through an exposure of certain issues during the first phase, each student will determine what he or she is passionate about and what he or she wants to try to change. Here, most students will have already identified issues that are of personal interest or consequence to them. Perhaps one of the students has a family member who is gay or lesbian. This student may opt to explore the causes and outcomes of homophobia, hoping to help establish a tolerant and gender-

inclusive society. If a young girl is battling with conforming to the sexualized expectations of our Western society, she may choose to explore the objectification of young women in the media; seeking ways to opt out of a stereotypical portrayal. Possibly, a student has witnessed cyber-bullying and has just stood by idly. Feeling disappointed in himself, he may decide to advocate against cyber-bullying and violence so that he makes choices that are empowering and help him uphold his moral code. These are, from my experience, real issues that students will explore and, later in the unit, literally stand up for with the goal of being transformative. In this second phase, students explore deeply, through Inquiry-based learning (IBL), the issues that they choose and are passionate about emerging from the videos and discussions during Phase 1.

In Phase 2, students focus on developing and responding to inquiry questions. After having begun to understand critical societal or personal issues, the students, from my experience, are motivated to discover more. During this stage of the unit, I encourage students to investigate issues that they will be enthused to act upon. Facilitating this stage requires me as teacher to act as facilitator helping students towards their inquiry with questions such as "What will be the scope of our inquiry?" and "Which resources will work best?" (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 27). Although this approach is student-centered, the teacher needs to initially support the students as they generate questions, explore situations and discover or create their own solutions to these issues (Maaß & Artigue, 2013, p. 780). Students also need to be supported in this approach from the beginning, as it may differ from their previous learning experiences. At its core, IBL has students tackle real world problems, explore questions of their own design, solve problems/create solutions, collaborate, and develop a comprehensive understanding (Teach Inquiry, n.d.).

As the students work through this inquiry process in phase 2 of the unit, they know that the end goal of this research is action.

Students begin Phase 2, then, by identifying key questions that they want to investigate which are based on the critical topics that we have either discussed in class or that they feel compelled to explore for their own reasons. Effective inquiry questions do not have a definitive answer; they are open-ended (Alberta Learning, 2004). These questions are to be thought-provoking and broad in scope. The key question is meant for students to explore, with these explorations leading to new questions or understanding that connect to the initial question rather than to a short response (Teach Inquiry, n.d.). This approach helps to develop breadth and depth of learning. Examples of effective student inquiry questions for this unit could include:

How does bullying impact the emotional culture of a school?

What can I do to create a culture of inclusivity in my community?

What roles can males play in the fight to minimize the objectification of females?

In my community, how effective are the current ecofriendly systems of reducing, reusing and recycling?

How are the Aboriginal people in BC still being marginalized?

During this phase, the teacher must focus on turning the inquiry process over to the students while still helping them learn how to conduct a proper inquiry. Effective questioning with minimal re-direction is useful in helping to guide students towards the depth of exploration. I have found that teacher questions and comments, such as those below, useful as they "allow students to explore unknown social or cognitive territory in

order to make meaning that is significant to their personal needs" (Simpson et al., 2010, p. 1):

> *Where do we see an example of that in our community?*
>
> *Whom could you talk to about that topic?*
>
> *Have you or anyone in your family or circle of friends experienced this?*
>
> *What do you think a possible counter-argument might be?*
>
> *What are some recent and local examples of that?*
>
> *What haven't you tried yet?*
>
> *Where else can this go?*
>
> *What impact does this topic have on other people?*
>
> *How are <u>(insert names of groups of people)</u> affected by this?*
>
> *What have we heard in the news recently about this?*
>
> *How do you think people would react to your issue?*
>
> *What kinds of people might disagree with you and what might they say?*

Questions like these are meant to be broad and open, but should guide students to thinking comprehensively and more critically about their chosen topics, and make connections to their own experience. The student should continue to draw connections between their questions and other aspects of their personal lives, further deepening their investigation, exploring multiple layers of those interrelated concepts. When this happens, authentic, comprehensive, critical, and interdisciplinary learning is actualized, and the students' excitement mounts as demonstrated in the research of Levy et al. (2013). Furthermore, students will often overlap their issues and concepts with other students, so collaborative opportunities exist for students to be able to have authentic

personalized and inquiry-based experiences in a shared, socio-constructivist learning environment. It is common to hear students buzzing with "Did you know" statements. I have found that when this happens, the students' learning has become thorough and authentic. My role as teacher is to foster that and guide the students towards this understanding and the potential to make personal or societal changes based upon their developing understandings.

At times during the inquiry process direct instruction is required. Many students do not know how to conduct effective research, nor do they know how to write effective and socially appropriate letters or emails to gather the information that they require to complete valid and reliable inquiry-based research. I have used whole-class modeling, guiding and collaborative writing using a computer and LCD projector to demonstrate effective research skills. I also work closely with individuals as they progress through the IBL process. Throughout this unit, teachers may use what methods they see fit to address the students' development of their research and writing skills. My suggestion is to make it as generative and actively student-centered as possible, as my experience shows that students learn best when they are invested and engaged in the act of learning (Childress & Benson, 2014; Hathaway & Jaquith, 2014).

In this second phase of the unit, students will have undergone an inquiry process that allows them to make greater sense of themselves in their world.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate

in the transformation of their world (Freire, 1970, p. 34).

Here, they have learned how to conduct inquiry, how to further personalize their learning, how to explore topics with layers of questions, and how to support each other with shared knowledge and resources. They should have a thorough understanding of critical issues and be a developing expert in one. Finally, they should have an idea, through their learning and motivation, of what they want to speak out for or against.

As students move into Phase 3 and explore how to compose spoken word poetry, they will have an idea of what they want to say and do to act upon the topics that they have explored. The foundation of information, opinions and reflection that each student has will be used for advocacy in the next steps. In the next section, I will discuss Phase 3, Learning spoken word poetry, and explain what the phase entails, how to develop it, and why it is important.

Phase 3 – Learning spoken word poetry

During this phase, I begin by exploring what the students already know and feel about spoken word poetry. This step not only gives the teacher a baseline for what each student knows and needs to know, but it also provides the teacher with an understanding of what knowledge and skills are already within the community of learners that can be shared and developed from within. As a community of learners, we share our knowledge and skills with the group through collaboration (Teach Inquiry, n.d.). As learners we are stronger together than we are apart. With that understanding, students support each other in the development of their critical, spoken word poetry.

The goal of this phase is to have students write critical poems that not only advocate for justice and fairness, but also offer potential solutions that can help students.

Here students "develop consciousness of freedom… and the ability to take constructive action" (Besley, 2012, p. 594). Teachers have the option in this phase of instructing on the writing of spoken word poems as they best see fit. However, I chose to guide students through this learning process by using mentor texts (Culham, 2014) or best examples of spoken word poems as compositional models across informational and poetic genres. We then discussed and analyzed the mentor text poems in dialogic fashion. With clear examples of poetry and discussions about the poetic process fresh in their minds, students were then encouraged to draft and workshop their poems. In this phase they shared their poems and revised their poems as many times as they felt necessary in a writer's workshop approach. In this way, students have the opportunity to support and mentor peers or offer constructive feedback. Class-time also needs to be devoted to teaching students how to offer feedback effectively, as "collaborative learning only works when students know how to work well together" (Simpson et al., 2010, p. 4).

My role as teacher was to circulate to individuals and ask questions that helped guide the student in developing an understanding of what he or she was doing with their authorial voice and the topic that they were addressing in their poetic compositions. When teachers use questions "to guide the development of the children's understanding" (Simpson et al., 2010, p. 3) and to have them apply their new knowledge to their own creative constructs, the learning belongs to the student. In this stage, teacher questions could include:

How do you think your audience would respond to this statement?

What is it you want readers to take away with them after hearing your poem?

How does this sound when you read it out loud?

Can you think of something that this could be compared to?

Where do you see some opportunities to include some internal rhyme?

Talk about how your use of language and phrasings impact your poem.

What are some ways in which you could make your poem more figurative or

metaphorical?

The questions are reflective and are intended to have students consider their poems and possibly see other ways to compose. Ultimately, revisions are the author's decision based upon what his or her goals and intention are.

My experience with the whole-class dialogic approach to composing spoken word poetry reflects Scarbrough and Allen's (2014) findings of ELA classrooms that can be characterized as "collective engagement with a genre, anticipation of a real audience, and renegotiation of classroom authority" (p. 475). In my own class during this second phase of the unit, students mentioned to me that they felt supported, their words and ideas were valued by me and their peers, and they became open to revising their writing multiple times.

While initially some students were hesitant to share their writing with their peers or their teacher, they soon realized that by doing so, they were able to be in charge of their own product and their learning. The empowerment they felt through the process of writing and representing their voices was reflected in their poems. The students composed powerful works of critical poetry that they were ready to share more publicly. A pastiche example of the students' poetry is below:

Have you ever felt the pain of someone calling you fat, stupid, and useless?

'Cause I have… and it hurts.

People filled greed and infertile seeds will never ever see how they're making people bleed because they're filled with a need to feed the anger and selfishness that this world has produced over the years.

Be who you wanna be, wear what you wanna wear, because the beauty of yourself is not defined by your hair, your eyes, or clothes that you bare. It is defined by you.

I bet there was no homophobia in our underdeveloped, primitive primate ancestors. And as homo sapiens developed, we did not.

Through their critical spoken word poetry, the students rename their world and begin to transform it (Freire, 1970). For this compositional phase, connections can be made directly to the British Columbia Ministry of Education's draft curriculum (2013). Here there is competency development including critical and creative thinking, communication, and positive personal and cultural identity; as well as concept and skill development such as language use and style, expression, personal and poetic writing, literary elements and devices, oral and written language, and metacognition (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013).

Student writing is authentic in its purpose and its generation. It is founded on personal interest, inquiry-based research, and demonstrates both growth in competencies and skills, and personal identity. The pride and smiles that I have seen on my students' faces, the confident glow that they exude after completing their critical spoken word poems at this point in the unit is tangible, and they are ready to proceed to the next phase.

In this section, Phase 3, students have learned collaboratively and through exposure to spoken word poetry how to compose their own poems that are based entirely on the research they have already conducted through inquiry and dialogue. In the next

phase, students digitize their spoken word poems; exploring both the performance aspect of spoken word poetry as well as new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013) practices of recording, polishing and publishing their work digitally.

Phase 4 – Digital video composition

In Phase 4, students focus on digitizing their spoken word poems. Here, students are responsible for independently and collaboratively establishing what they already know and what new learning they intend to gain in relation to the 'new technical stuff' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013) that they will use for capturing and sharing their poems digitally. Having been exposed to many videos throughout the unit as both sources of information and mentor texts, they will be aware of video, animation, stop motion, time lapse, visual and sound effects and other digital composition elements. Based on what they already know, they are to then target a new learning for their digital composition – their new literacies – which may also require a new ethos (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013).

In my experiences, there will be students near one end of the technology use spectrum and they may explore iMovie™ or MovieMaker™ as a way of capturing and editing their own presentation of their poem. They may learn how to capture video, edit video, use transitions and text, perhaps with a song in the background. Other students may have already tried and mastered these technological features, so they may set other challenging goals such as adding powerful original still images to multiple takes of edited video with some music, sound effects and text. Other students will explore animation or stop motion, adding an original song through GarageBand™ or they may find appropriate open source music to download and use; possibly creating different visual and sound effects to incorporate into their digital composition. At this phase, each student should:

set his or her learning goals, identify and document his or her learning during and at the end of the phase. This documentation occurs through classroom blogging. I will discuss this process of blogging later in this section.

In addition to learning new literacies, students will, by engaging in this phase of the unit, develop a much greater understanding of the performance aspect of spoken word poetry. While recording their voices or performances, students will have opportunities to engage in assessment for learning as they review themselves and make revision decisions based on what they observe and what their peers tell them they observe. Throughout this phase, students develop a greater understanding of audience and purpose, voice and tone, expressing ideas and making an impact, as well as the development of communicating through digital text (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). As they capture their voice and manipulate it digitally, students will notice whether they need to improve enunciation, and they will find ways to express vocally using such spoken word techniques as playing with volume, tone and tempo (Richardson, 2010). Students digitally capturing themselves reciting will be able to discern their use of body language and facial expression in addition to the vocal elements mentioned above. The digitization of their poems is an important step to help students present their poetry compositions in a powerful and convincing manner.

My own students often express anger and frustration towards other teachers who ban technology from their classrooms. Many teachers feel that they have to compete with digital technologies such as smart phones and iPads™ (Richardson, 2010). New literacies encourage teachers to develop a new ethos and be open to trying the new technical stuff – have students learn through the tools of their time (Kist, 2012; Lankshear & Knobel,

2013). As I began to incorporate digital technologies into my classroom, the students' motivation increased greatly. Once digital technologies are allowed into the classroom, teachers also can engage in conversations around digital responsibility and self-regulation with students. These are important aspects of learning in contemporary times and will continue to be important as digital communication devices continue to become more mobile, personal and integrated into many aspects of students' lives (Prensky, 2012). The challenge posed to teachers and students by incorporating digital technologies into the classroom includes challenges to traditional approaches to literacy (Nahachewsky, 2013; Richardson, 2010). These literacy and learning moments are not to be dismissed, as such challenges are an important element of teaching through critical pedagogy (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Arguably, digitally recording and representing spoken word poetry is an important step in critical pedagogy. Through these spoken word poems, students can represent or speak for themselves and others who are marginalized. Both populations have historically had very limited access to representing and publishing their experiences (schooling or otherwise). However, the rapid growth of "information and communication technologies has provided ordinary people with unprecedented opportunities to take on the ruling educational power structure and pedagogy" (Kellner & Kim, 2010, p. 4). Students, through the digital recording and publication of their poetry, can help to shape and create a culture that is aware of social problems and aligned with their own values and ideas, crucial in critical pedagogy (Kesler, 2014; Scarbrough & Allen, 2014).

Students learn this through a combination of exploration, peer support, and one-on-one or small group mini-lessons. The amount of digital wisdom (Prensky, 2012) that

the student body possesses far exceeds my abilities, yet with proper facilitation, questioning and connection to other experts, students are able to develop their knowledge and skills in new literacies with my guidance, connection and facilitation.

In this unit, students also participate on a secure class-based blog using kidblog.org™ and record their compositional process and progress during this phase. On this platform, students have individual blogs within a class blog. Their posts and work are shared within the classroom and potentially can be shared to a world-wide audience. I did not open our class blog to the world-wide audience at this point as I wanted to provide a public (classroom) but safe platform for them to express and explore their own compositional processes. Through their blogs they shared their learning intentions and goals, and they posted formative reflections on their growth. In this phase of the unit the students may upload written, visual or auditory examples of their progress as they move through various stages of revision so that their development can be captured, both in mini-exhibits and in their words and reflections. Here, they become aware that they are presenting to an audience (Richardson, 2010), not just with their poetry videos, but also with their written reflections. Students begin to comment on each other's blog sites and give positive or constructive feedback, perhaps asking questions that the blogger may be able to consider for his or her composition. Many students take the opportunity to return to and revise their poetry, realizing what their audience understands from their work. Sometimes students also go back in a recursive manner into the research to gather a deeper understanding of their inquiry topic that relates to Kesler's (2014) findings from his study of pre-service graduate students who designed multimodal texts to inform their understanding of social justice issues.

In this section, I have discussed the fourth phase of my critical digital composition unit – how students learn to digitize their spoken word poems through digital video composition. In this phase they gain skills with new technical abilities of digital video recording and blogging, become aware of their own compositional processes, and help to present personally or socially relevant topics to peers and a worldwide audience. Of personal importance is the understanding that they have created original works that represent their voices and identities. They have now taken ownership of their learning by setting goals and learning intentions and by exploring new learning as it relates to their own personalized learning. As a community of learners, the students will have worked together to develop new skills and concepts, supporting each other with lessons and dialogue and assisting in critical reflection. Their digital writings are artefacts of self-expression and social criticism and have the power and potential to transform themselves and their society. The initial sharing session through the digital filming and presentation of their spoken word poetry through the blogs in this phase is important for students being able to develop their comfort around sharing their work and their voice publicly. This scaffolding of the students' knowledge, skills and attitudes is crucial for the unit's next phase – Performance night – during which a celebration is held for students, parents, educators, friends and community members to publicly recognize the learning accomplishments and critical compositions of the students.

Phase 5 – Performance night

In this section, I discuss Performance night. This phase of the unit has students share and celebrate their learning and poetry with an invited audience by either showing their digital compositions or performing their poetry orally. Many students are not yet

ready to take a stand in front of a wider audience, so bringing in an invited audience creates many benefits. First, it allows the students the opportunity to share what they have learned with a known audience, and to be recognized by that audience for their hard work. Second, presenting their socially conscious poetry to a crowd makes their poetry public, providing them an authentic audience with potentially impactful outcomes. Third, a performance provides them with a meaningful and authentic purpose for completing and sharing their poetry, which is crucial to critical literacy practices (Gatto, 2013). The celebration event gives them motivation as well as encouragement to prepare their work with a sense of pride. Fourth, by presenting not only their poetry, but also a prepared talk on what they have learned encourages students to engage in metacognitive reflection on what they have learned and how they, themselves, have been transformed by the work they have completed during the course of the critical digital composition unit. This approach helps clarify their purpose and helps to promote a positive self-identity; both crucial elements in their development as young people becoming adults (Mariano & Going, 2011).

For the Performance night, I gave the Grade 6/7 students more responsibility – a gradual release of responsibility citation – turning the format and organization over to the students. I helped them to identify the goals of completing, reflecting, sharing, and celebrating. At this point, students were energized, and while many were scared of performing their poetry, they had an understanding that spoken word poetry – if it were meant to create change or to be critical – should be shared to an even more public audience than on the Kidblog™ platform which, as mentioned, we limited to a class-wide audience. The stance of giving more responsibility to the students speaks to the socio-

constructivist nature of this unit, but also to the dialogic teaching approach that I use as a framework throughout.

As a class we returned to dialogism to collectively discuss and develop a celebratory event. My role was to empower the students, to help them feel success. Individually, each student was responsible for preparing a speech and the poem, though each student could opt for a live performance or a digital presentation of the poem. Furthermore, students democratically distributed the roles of program designer, food and beverage manager, set up team, take down team, video manager, and host – which ended up being shared between four students as a way of including everyone who wanted that role. Every student who wanted to participate was able to take on a satisfying role. Collectively, they brainstormed where to get, and who could provide, materials for the event including a digital projector, a screen, a computer with preloaded and ordered videos, food, beverages, and seats; and they were able to decide upon and book a space. When problems in organization arose, I simply encouraged dialogue by asking how we could overcome those challenges. The more I turned the event over to the students, the more excited, collaborative and productive they became. By Performance night, the students created and hosted a very successful event in large part because the process was dialogic and informed by critical pedagogy. The students had power over their learning.

In preparation for their performances, students had to bring many literacy learning, including new literacies elements, to a culmination. With the pressure of having to perform in front of an audience, students started rehearsing their poems or polishing their digital videos. If they were performing live, they wanted to make sure that their delivery was polished, that they presented with as much attention to spoken word

conventions as they could, and that their use of volume, tone, facial expression, body language and timing was optimal for delivering their message; spoken word delivery elements that they learned from watching and discussing spoken word videos. If showing their videos, students wanted to ensure that they conveyed meaning in the most effective manner, that the effects were used purposefully and with precision, that the digital complexity of their compositions heightened the meaning and impact of their intended message.

In this phase, students will learn and develop many competencies, concepts and skills recognized in the British Columbia draft curriculum. Students will develop their oral communication skills, experimenting with voice and tone to connect to their audience, develop voice and style through creative oral language use, and celebrate and realize the powerful and beautiful effects of language and how it can be used for effect (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). Perhaps most importantly for me as teacher though, were the smiles and pride that the students displayed; the confidence and self-efficacy that these young people developed.

In this section, I outlined the Performance night, and how to use dialogism and personal investment to recognize and celebrate both the power and beauty of language that students have to share (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). Dialogism and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981) inform the organization and structuring of a student-led event that recognizes the learning, growth and new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013) of the students. Such public presentation and advocacy is a necessary component of critical pedagogy, as students "deal critically and creatively with

reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1970, p. 39).

In the next section, I explain the final phase of the unit – an optional phase – Taking a Stand. In this phase, students can take greater risks as they share their voices with a broader world, targeting – as an audience – those groups who are marginalized or those who marginalize others. This optional phase must be entered into voluntarily, as some students may not be prepared to make their voices or opinions more public than the contexts of a classroom blog or Performance night. Those students who do choose to 'take a stand' and advocate to a broader audience will do so, in part, because they have understood that in order to effect change and possibly transform their world, they must interact with it, speak to it, name it and rename it (Freire, 1970) in a true critical literacy fashion.

Phase 6 – Taking a stand

In this optional phase of the critical digital composition unit that I designed and taught, students may choose to take a further public stand – beyond the classroom blog and Performance night – regarding the topics and issues of personal and social importance. Having developed a deep collaborative understanding of social issues through dialogism, selected and investigated a social issue topic of personal importance through Inquiry-based learning, drafted, work-shopped, digitized and performed their performance poetry piece, students finally have the opportunity to advocate by identifying and publishing to more select audiences than their classroom blog or public performance night.

It is important to keep in mind that for many students, particularly those still in elementary or middle school, taking a stand can be incredibly risky and nerve-wracking. This phase and the insecurities that may accompany it are mitigated by adult support. In my Grade 6/7 class, I asked who would want to take a more public stand. We discussed what that stand may look like and how the students might approach and prepare for it. Several were directly asked if they would because the message they had to share was critical and both clearly and powerfully expressed. Those students who declined were not pushed again, though they were made aware that they could always change their minds. Those students who accepted the challenge had one-on-one conferences about their poetry and they received private mentoring outside of regular instructional hours. Parents were consulted and their approval required, as my students were only 11 and 12 years old, and sometimes the parents were included in the preparation for Taking a stand. Administration was contacted for students who wished to present at a school-wide assembly, and students were required to discuss their presentation to the principal, as she wanted to support the student in his or her successful delivery and offer encouragement or feedback wherever necessary. For those submitting to news agencies or politicians, they were coached on how to connect formally and contact information was sourced collaboratively or through a guided process. Because of the magnitude of Taking a stand, student nerves and anxiety could run high, and the adults were present to support them through it to help the students make it a powerful, meaningful and successful endeavour. In my class, six students took a stand beyond Performance night and the class blog. All six felt empowered and proud.

While curricular connections in this phase are similar to those in Phase 5, there are some other important reasons for students to 'take a stand.' Advocating for something that one believes in helps students to forge a positive personal identity (Mariano & Going, 2011), and builds self-confidence and self-image. I have seen that when students take a moral stance, a positive culture change takes place; other students begin to be more comfortable in their differences and their individuality, and they start to establish their own moral footing by becoming advocates for other causes.

This optional phase is relatively simple, though it is not without its challenges. Taking a stand requires that students publicize their digital representations of their spoken word poems as videos on YouTube™ or another suitable platform. They may present their poems in person to target audiences who are connected to the social challenge or personal injustice. Students speaking against bullying may take a stand in front of the school at an assembly and present their poems. Those working to vanquish homophobia may send their video link to a Gay-Straight Alliance or a LGBTQ2 association. A student advocating against the sexual objectification of young women in the media might email her video link to the news, or other media and businesses such as magazines or film corporations that perpetuate the objectification and overt sexualization of young women.

The outcome of this process, as I have witnessed, is that some of these students take on roles of advocacy that extend well beyond the unit. Their critical and new literacy work begins to help forge their identities. I have seen students join clubs for sexual equality, establish clubs that support individuality, begin to stand up for the bullied and even hug the bully. Transformation of self and society is the true benefit, and it happens when that deep reflective process combines with critical action as praxis (Freire, 1970).

I have presented a critical reflection on the creation, organization and implementation of my critical digital composition unit, through six phases – namely: (1) Exposure to and dialogue about social issues; (2) Inquiry into issues that require social transformation; (3) Learning spoken word poetry; (4) Digital video composition; (5) Performance night; and (6) Taking a stand. I now turn to personal reflections on this Master of Education project, and then in the final section I present two considerations for future research.

Reflecting on my Master of Education project

"To speak a true word is to transform the world" ~ Paulo Freire (1970, p. 87)

Freire's critical and transformative philosophy of education has been my pedagogical guide for the past two years of my teaching. Engaging students in this multi-phase unit – informed by critical pedagogy and new literacies – was valuable to both me as a teacher and to my learners in the Grade 6/7 ELA class. I believe that the key strengths of the unit included the personalization of learning that leads to increased student motivation, production and depth of learning. The dialogic nature of the unit instils a culture of collaboration and develops many oral and written communication skills that are beneficial to the students. The co-construction of knowledge through discussion and inquiry also creates deep and authentic learning. The students' writings are also authentic in that they choose meaningful and real-life topics that allow them to not only feel connected to purpose, but also to develop a positive sense of self-identity by contributing to their society in meaningful ways. As the unit focuses on digital technologies and new literacies, students are using tools that are not only motivating, but are also important for many of them in their future studies or work (Prensky, 2012). The

learning tasks in this unit are challenging and personal, which helps students to learn how to overcome their fears and take greater risks with their learning. The unit directly addresses a number of learning outcomes and competencies that the British Columbia Ministry of Education's draft ELA curriculum (2013) proposes.

My experiences in organizing, designing and implementing this unit are that when authentic opportunities for students to explore, develop, write about, and present regarding issues that are personally relevant and important, the students thrive in terms of collaboration, enthusiasm for learning tasks and transfer of knowledge. It became evident to me that their motivation and engagement is high. Their learning is rich and deep. They thrive off learning environments that address the technologies of today, rather than being told to 'put that device away.' Digital mobile and personal communication devices are a reality, and teaching students how to use them for Inquiry-based learning and critical literacy is an important skill. Students also highly value being able to engage in meaningful dialogue and share their ideas. Having them learn to ask questions and be a part of conversations in a mature and enriched learning environment helps them to mature and feel valued. Celebrating their growth and productivity helps them to transform and develop self-identity.

As discussed at the beginning of both chapters 2 and 3, in my teaching I have asked myself: How can my students use spoken word poetry and digital media to be authentic writers in the 21st century to advocate for, and possibly create, social change? And for my Master of Education project I asked: What are the pedagogical challenges and opportunities in creating and supporting a writing program that articulates critical pedagogies and new literacies for the potential of students' personal and social

transformation? While educators who practice critical pedagogy and new literacies may never know if students truly have a transformative impact on others, the hope exists that their influence will positively change the course of their own and others' lives. Although I may not ultimately know the outcome of this project for my own students, I do know the outcome of this Master of Education project for my own professional development and teaching. As scholar I came to a deeper and broader understanding of the processes that I engaged in through the literature – that I am not acting alone as an educator who values critical pedagogy and N/new L/literacies. I see my role as a teacher, especially within this critical digital composition project, as empowering students to become that which lies within their potential. Freire wrote, "What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves" (as cited in Horton et al., 1990, p. 181). It is my hope that this project – including the review of literature, reflection on my organization, design and implementation of a critical, digital composition unit, and the attached teaching resources for my unit plan entitled "Composing as a Powerful 21ˢᵗ Century Author Advocating for Social Change," the *Morning Media Moment*, and the student handout (Appendices A, B and C) – serve as a meaningful impetus and model for other educators engaging in critical pedagogy at a time of rapid technological change and societal challenges.

Although this Master of Education project has proven transformative for both my teaching and my students' literacy learning, it has also revealed certain gaps in the literature and research. In the final section of this project, I present two areas in which research should be conducted. In particular I suggest that future research consider the

transformative effects that critical digital texts and student composition may have on addressing or equalizing imbalances and injustices that exist in our society.

Implications for future research

With the rise in popularity of YouTube™ and other digital social media sites, performance poetry has risen to prominence. Artists like Suli Breaks, Shane Koyczan, Brenna Twohy, and Denise Frohman; and organizations like Youth Speaks, Brave New Voices, and Button Poetry are prominent critical spoken word voices advocating for social change through the Internet. Longitudinal research needs to be conducted to determine the transformative impact of such digital media texts and poetry on students' understanding of, and action towards, social change. Questions such as "How do students identify with the poets who present their critical voice and compositions online?" and "Are Canadian youth – their identities and critical societal issues – represented in the videos they view on various digital platforms?" are important to investigate.

N/new L/literacies continue to emerge both as an educational framework and within students' daily literacy practices. These are worth pursuing through research, particularly within middle years classroom contexts. My Master of Education project has shown that there is educational and personal value in students' composing and presenting spoken word poetry through digital formats. Whether these compositions, and their presentation to a broader audience in both digital and non-digital contexts, help to create intended social change needs further investigation. Also, at a time of curricular reform, it is crucial to understand whether personalized approaches support such transformative practices in the classroom. Importantly, discourse around these areas – N/new L/literacies and critical pedagogy – needs to continue and to be informed by research. In this way, the

discourse of Education itself may be changed with the potential for creating a more

egalitarian and just society for the present and future generations of students.

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Appendix A

Composing as a Powerful 21st Century Author Advocating for Social Change

Basics: This is a student-centred, inquiry-based learning and personalized learning unit that has students engage in deep and meaningful research with authentic 21st Century writing and representing opportunities not only to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes, but also to advocate for and possibly create social change. The unit is founded upon critical pedagogy and utilizes 21st Century learning systems and digital technologies. Students will embark on a 5-6 phase unit of learning:

1. Exposure to and Dialogue about Social Issues
2. Inquiry into Issues that Require Social Transformation
3. Learning Spoken Word Poetry
4. Video Composition
5. Performance Night
6. Taking a Stand (an optional phase in which students advocate publicly)

Timeline: Flexible, but 2 months or longer is ideal

Theoretical Platform and Rationale: As stated, this unit is founded on critical theory, including the work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. As such, student learning will be facilitated by the teacher and not directed by the teacher. Much of the unit is collaborative, even though each student will conduct independent research and write individual poems. Because this unit is not meant to be prescriptive, the teacher needs to focus on the overarching Big Ideas in order to allow students to adapt the unit to their own needs.

The rationale behind this unit is that students at the middle school level crave opportunities to take ownership, collaborate, express themselves, make a difference, work with and learn about new technologies, and form a positive self-identity. This is an in-depth unit that addresses all those concepts. At the same time, this unit develops a variety of competencies and addresses many curricular outcomes of the BC Ministry of Education's new curricular documents, Transforming Curriculum and Assessment (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2014).

Educational Goals for students: These are organized as what students can Know, Do and Be through this project. The Know and the Do are from Transforming Curriculum and Assessment. The Be is not in the curricular documents, but is arguably more important in transformative pedagogy. We teach students, not just concepts and skills.

Be
To be a powerful 21st Century advocate for social change
To be a collaborative, creative and critical thinker
Do – 21st Century competencies
Create, collaborate, communicate, build character, learn digital technology skills

Know – Curricular Big Idea (Grade 7)
"Using language with increasing artistry and precision is a powerful tool for communicating for a variety of purposes and audiences" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2014)

Essential Questions for Students (allow for others that are important to students):
How can I use my voice to advocate for social change and to transform our reality?
How can I shape language to connect to a targeted audience effectively and powerfully?
What is writing in the 21st Century digital world?

Curricular Outcome Scan Across Grades (broad scan of Grades 3-5, 6-7, 8-9):

Grade 3-5 Band Creating and Communicating	Grade 6-7 Band Creating and Communicating	Grade 8-9 Band Creating and Communicating
Apply oral language to explore and express ideas, communicate with others, and contribute as a member of a classroom community	Explore and express ideas, opinions, and perspectives to communicate clearly through oral language	Use oral language to explore and express ideas, communicate clearly, and evoke emotion
Use the writing process to improve clarity	Use the writing process to improve clarity	Use the stages of the writing process to improve clarity
Express ideas thoughts, feelings, and opinions through various forms of communication	Create a variety of personal, informational, and imaginative texts according to purpose and audience	Present ideas and information and adjust point of view, voice, and tone for a variety of purposes
Employ a variety of communication forms according to audience and purpose	Use language creatively to express ideas, evoke emotion, and create impact	Apply the conventions of language to clarify meaning in written and oral communication
Create a variety of texts to explore self, family, and community	Experiment with point of view, voice, and tone to suit the purpose and audience in oral and written communication	Refine form and structure according to purpose, audience, and context
Apply language in creative and playful ways to develop, style, voice, artistry, and point of view	Use literary devices and techniques to create meaning and achieve purpose	Assess and adjust communication to improve its clarity, effectiveness, and impact
Recognize and use conventions and features of	Apply the conventions of language to clarify meaning	Manipulate language to refine meaning, create

language	in written and oral communication	voice, develop style, and create artistry
Create and communicate meaning by designing, editing, revising, refining and presenting	Develop and defend an opinion or point of view with supporting evidence	Develop and defend a position with supporting evidence
	Assess, adjust, and manipulate language to clarify meaning, create voice, and develop style and artistry	Create a variety of texts to communicate ideas, create impact, and evoke emotion
	Compare ideas encountered in a variety of texts and genres	Employ stylistic and rhetorical devices to create meaning and achieve purpose
	Understand the ways in which language changes and evolves	Synthesize ideas encountered within and between various text forms
		Understand the ways in which language changes and evolves

Selected Broad-based Know, Do, Be Outcomes for Grade 7 (as an example):

Broad-Based Outcomes	Know	Do	Be
Engage in collaborative dialogue and meaning making of social issues	Communication skills – speaking and listening respectfully	Ask questions, make comments and connections Reflect and internalize Personalize learning	A respectful collaborator in a community of learners
Engage in inquiry	Stages of inquiry Methods of research Qualifying sources	Research using multiple strategies to source information	A curious learner who is skilled at delving deeply for information
Compose an original Spoken Word poem	Poetry Voice	Compose using the writing process – prewriting, drafting,	A powerful composer with personal voice

	Rhythm	editing, publishing	
	Rhyme (end, half and internal)		
	Line, verse and stanza		
	Poetic devices – similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, alliteration, repetition, euphony, dissonance, assonance, consonance, cacophony		
Refine, revise & restructure for purpose and audience	Strategies to improve writing Audience Purpose	Refine, revise, restructure (edit)	A thoughtful critic of one's own work
Perform the original composition as a Spoken Word poem	Spoken Word poetry (purpose, language, tone, gestures, facial expression, posture)	Perform	A purposeful performer of powerful language
Video the performance Edit the video for increased effect to convey meaning more powerfully Upload video to YouTube and blog Present or send to specific targets	iMovie – drop video, cut & crop video, fade transitions, video techniques, lighting, staging Privacy settings Sharing links Blog posts	Video/Edit Upload/share Present/advocate	An online advocate of and contributor to social change

6 Phases (suggestions for the teacher):

In the section below, I outline the six phases of the critical digital unit. These six phases take the students through a process of dialogue and inquiry through to the publication of potentially transformative digital composition. While the structure provided here is linear, students will often move back to a phase in which they were previously engaged, as they

develop a more complex and developed understanding of their topic. Furthermore, each student will move between the phases, particularly the first four, at their own pace. This unit allows for that flexibility.

Phase 1 – Exposure to and dialogue about social issues

Explore social issues and develop foundational understandings. In this phase, you will guide students through a collection of videos and discussions that focus on social issues of injustice or marginalization. If you have a class that is socially charged, they may be able to offer you a few suggestions from the beginning, but you may need to stimulate them with some common themes: bullying, female stereotypes, racism, pollution. As much as possible, try to share videos that use spoken word, for example, as this will be the format that they will likely be using in future phases. This phase develops dialogic talk in the classroom and starts to develop collective consciousness and collaboration. I frame my discussions around three concepts:

1. Big ideas
2. Questions
3. Comments and connections

Dialogism needs to be learned, so you should use many open-ended and evocative questions that elicit response and generate questions, modelling dialogism for the students. The establishment of respectful communication systems is paramount. During the discussion, let the students know what is coming next, and have them begin to personalize and explore issues that are important to them. Try to encourage students to take the facilitator role after they have learned how that role is played through your modelling. They will start to bring videos (I recommend previewing all videos for appropriateness for your class and your students), and lead the discussions. See the Morning Media Moments page (Appendix A) for more information.

During this phase, your goal is to have students identify the foundations of injustice and marginalization. They should be able to develop the vocabulary of oppression and understand how power imbalances often cause and perpetuate inequities. Ask questions that lead to their understanding of power imbalances and democracy. Students should be able to identify an issue or two that they connect to and feel passionate about addressing.

This phase may continue to overlap the other phases of this unit, as a means of developing further depth of understanding of society's issues that require transformation.

Success indicators:

Students will

- Develop an understanding of key concepts such as:
  - Marginalization, oppression, objectification, injustice, power imbalance
- Contribute to collective examination of topics including:
  - Raising critical issues clearly, openly and respectfully
  - Critical and respectful questioning of peers
  - Clarifying, summarizing and synthesizing of ideas

- o Drawing upon and sharing real or hypothetical examples
- o Thinking critically about the reliability and validity of information
- o Expressing and exploring counterpoints, whether they agree or not
- o Critically analyzing video and text from a social, moral and ethical stance

Phase 2 – Inquiry into issues that require social transformation

Determine and explore the social cause for which you want to advocate. In this phase, each student must identify an issue that he or she feels is personally meaningful, and will conduct an inquiry into that issue. As students start to select topics, continue to hold Morning Media Moments (see Appendix B). Some students may switch topics as they become more passionate from being exposed to a new topic. For others, the Morning Media Moments may just develop a greater understanding of our society and how to communicate collaboratively and respectfully.

When students choose a topic to research, many have few research skills. In this phase, circulate and ask questions that help students realize how they will conduct research and what they will be doing with that information. Be clear that they are going to be experts in this particular field of ethnography. Even though they may not use every bit of information in their product (e.g., poem), they need to have a strong understanding of the issues, facts and opinions in order to be credible and powerful in their writing. They may need guidance in terms of ways to research, how to qualify sources, how to avoid plagiarism, how to use multiple sources of information to verify information, and so on. Encourage them to use a variety of forms for research: Internet, text-based, video, interview, emails, news articles, and surveys. Help each individual make effective choices. As you and the other adults rotate and support, most students will be engaged in their projects as it is personally motivating to make decisions for reflection and action.

This phase may also continue as students move into other phases, as students return to their inquiry, fluidly moving back and forth, to seek answers to future questions that evolve from the project and progress towards being experts.

Success indicators:

Students will

- Demonstrate a deep awareness of social issues and reasons for taking a stand
- Make an empowering decision to investigate and defend an issue of personal importance
- Conduct an effective inquiry using a variety of sources
- Gather information and opinions for the sake of making a point
- Validate reliable sources of information

Phase 3 – Learning spoken word poetry

Examine many YouTube videos to be able to learn about and analyze spoken word. In this phase, students will learn how to write spoken word poetry, compose drafts that are focused on the issue they have conducted their inquiry into, and revise and redraft the poem. To learn about spoken word poems, I like to return to video and dialogue. This

time, as students watch such spoken word videos as Shane Koyczan's *Troll* or *To This Day*, Brave New Voices' *Somewhere in America*, or Suli Breaks' *I Will Not Let An Exam Result Decide My Fate* students will analyze the poems for three elements:

1. How they are constructed
2. How they are performed
3. How they are digitally composed

By bringing it back to a dialogic classroom, students will be able to collaborate to identify many of the hallmarks of spoken word, the poetic devices commonly used, themes and tone, rhythm and language, etc. Additionally, they will witness, discuss and learn about the performative aspect of spoken word. Last, they will explore the possibilities of digitizing their work, analyzing different visual possibilities and effects. I also find Gayle Danley's *Become a Slam Poet in Five Steps* a useful video for students to learn how to write spoken word poetry.

As a community of learners, you and your students will collect and share knowledge so that everyone becomes both a student/mentor and a collaborator of building knowledge. Opportunities will be given for practice writing/development and sharing/sample presentations with formative feedback from peers, teachers and selves (through video). Through this process, collaboration and sharing will be crucial to the development of the students' spoken word poems. A field trip to a Slam competition would be a fantastic experience if it exists and is available. Completing the spoken word writing happens here. The timing of this phase may overlap phases one and two.

Success indicators:

Students will

- Compose a spoken word poem that attends to the style, language, form, devices and delivery of spoken word
- Demonstrate an understanding of the connection between an author's words, intent, delivery & audience
- Critically analyze video and text from a writer/composer's stance
- Work collaboratively
- Provide and receive/utilize self and peer feedback for improvement
- Apply the writing process effectively

Phase 4 – Video composition

Develop author's digital voice by taking and editing video of an original spoken word poem. In the fourth phase, students begin by conducting a self-assessment of what they already know about digital composition. What have they done before and what do they need or want to learn next? What is an appropriate next step in their growth of new literacies? This may also require some collaborative conversation with peers who may have ideas for their next steps.

From there, they will be able to establish learning goals and a plan for the digitization of their spoken word poems. This then becomes a guide for each student's exploration and discovery of new digital knowledge and skills.

When digitizing, they will need to examine and focus on their delivery, as looked at in the previous phase. There are numerous opportunities for students to redraft based on what they see or hear in their delivery. They can have feedback from peers as well as students and parents, too.

Finished products need to be shared. If working with a class blog, students can upload them for the class and parents to see. Furthermore, they could chart a reflection of learning and how they have grown during this phase, whether on the blog or otherwise. Also, other opportunities for sharing will occur in the next two phases.

Success indicators:

Students will

- Shoot video and use iMovie/MovieMaker tools to be able to craft a video effectively that demonstrates learning of new digital literacy skills
- Cross-reference what they wanted or needed to learn with what was actually learned – has there been growth? Where? How? Be specific.
- Successfully reflect upon growth and learning on the blog
- Successfully upload their spoken word video to YouTube and the class blog

Phase 5 – Performance night

Celebrate, advocate and share. In this phase, students will organize an event for an invited audience in order to celebrate, share and publicly advocate for social change in a safe environment. As this is a semi-public forum, students will need lots of support and encouragement. Students should have the option of presenting live or digitally. This may alleviate some of the pressure.

Students will need to present not only their spoken word poem, but also a brief speech on their learning and growth as it relates both to their increased awareness of social issues and also their growth as digital composers. As the presentation is performative in nature, drafting and practice is important. With the students, identify the overarching learning that they will need to address and discuss how that could look in a presentation. The speech should express the richness of their learning and could be live or digital, depending on student comfort level.

Success Indicators:

Students will

- Present a completed product, whether oral or digital
- Deliver a prepared speech, whether digital or oral, of what they have learned and how they have changed
- Demonstrate the techniques and presentation mode of spoken word
- Smile with pride on their faces (do not underestimate this one)

Phase 6 – optional – Taking a stand

Make an authentic difference by advocating publicly. In this last optional phase, students will have the opportunity to target select audiences with their poems. For many students,

this phase requires them to go well beyond their comfort levels. Many possibilities exist, but the focus should be on the key question: "Who needs to hear what I have to say?" Those people should be targeted. If a student is speaking out against bullying, he or she may address local schools, delivering a prepared speech on it and sharing the poem live. If a student is trying to stop water from being given to big businesses to sell for profit, he or she may email the video to the company involved such as Nestle or the MPs of the province, or perhaps send to CBC or a local TV company. If a student is advocating for media to stop sexualizing young women, he or she may post on YouTube and email the link to Disney, HBO, and Lucas Films. The possibilities are endless, but when done can be a very powerful and transformative act and experience.

Success indicators:

- As Phase 5 above

The Value:

Is this unit truly valuable and worth doing? This unit is personal and has an abundance of choice and personal investment and works towards making the world a better place. It addresses 21st Century skills and fundamentals in a relevant and meaningful way. Writing and communicating skills are a focus while they operate as a community of learners. They engage in dynamic and creative learning tasks that are not boxed in by excessive limitations, and the tasks are all doable, engaging and fun.

The Morning Media Moments are extremely valuable. They develop a collaborative and respectful culture, and they allow for student leadership. Both students who are comfortable speaking and those who are not feel valued and grow in this environment. Dialogism is embraced and used as a platform upon which the co-construction of knowledge is built.

Inquiry, a valuable 21st Century learning method, is embedded in phase two when students explore their social issues. This inquiry task focuses on personalized learning and developing knowledge in areas in which students are passionate. While personalized, each inquiry revolves a common theme, allowing for consultation with peers and the potential for collaboration or sharing of knowledge through engaging conversation.

21st Century higher-order thinking (HOT) skills are developed through this project. HOT is part of inquiring effectively, making sense of experiences, adapting and incorporating those experiences to one's own reality. Having a broad vision of transforming the world requires risk taking, and in order to be effective, analysis, evaluation, and defending a stance are all activated. Live performances on real-life issues with authentic writing for real purposes in front of a targeted audience makes this grounded in real world problem solving, also helping to develop positive self-identities.

Success indicators are explicit. The goals through each stage are clearly outlined and are connected to curricular objectives. Peer feedback, self-reflection and self-assessment, and teacher feedback are all easily embedded into each stage. Summative assessment can be conducted, if desired, at each phase.

Diverse approaches to learning are at the heart of the unit. Students can work independently, collaboratively, digitally, concretely, experimentally, artistically, and musically. Let the students make empowering decisions on how they can best tackle the subject matter and the production of the learning task.

Through this unit, student voice is not only honoured, but it is also developed. Student voice is recognized through the powerful choices each student gets to make around issues that the individual feels is important. Furthermore, the poetry itself is an expression of the development of personal voice.

Accountability is built into this unit in a few ways: as a member of a community of learners, as a collaborative peer offering ideas or feedback, as a contributor to a class blog, as a performer of poetry in front of an audience, and as a public digital writer.

Finally, both process and product are valued. While the end product and performance are important celebrations, the process is riddled with peer and self-assessments ad formative assessment from teachers to encourage revision and growth. There is a constant ebb and flow of "where are you at, where are you going, and how are you going to get there," that is a continuous dialogue between all parties including not only teacher to students but also students to students, and parents to students. Editing and revision, and tools, structures and lessons on how to conduct those steps are in place to allow for the valuing of process. With the presentations of the products and final performances, there is also an emphasis and celebration of the culminating activity.

Suggestions for Assessment:

There are many opportunities for a variety of forms of assessment during this multi-phase unit, and I will offer a few suggestions below for:
1. Assessment as learning (AAL)
2. Assessment for learning (AFL)
3. Assessment of learning (AOL)

Refer to your learning outcomes for your curriculum (prescribed or otherwise). Some programs may lean heavily on the mandated curriculum such as Transforming Curriculum and Assessment, while others may use a program specific curriculum, or a generative curriculum.

Phase 1: Exposure to and Dialogue about Social Issues
Student goals for contribution (AAL)
Student reflection on contribution (AFL)
Teacher questioning to elicit responses (AFL)
Student acknowledgement of other's contributions and points of view (AFL)
Conversations on the process of dialogue in the classroom (AAL)
Post-it responses of how the video affected the students (AFL)
Survey of connection to topics (AFL)
Teacher observations of dialogue – questioning, listening, contributing (AOL)

Phase 2: Inquiry into Issues that Require Social Transformation
Goal setting based on prior knowledge (AFL)
Blog reflections on new learning and ideas (AAL)
One-on-one teacher-student conferences on process (AFL)
Notes organizing and outlaying big ideas and details (AAL)
Small group discussions on learning through inquiry (AAL)
Interviews on growth (AOL)
Blog posts on growth and learning (AAL, AOL)

Phase 3: Learning Spoken Word Poetry
Writer's workshop building basic skills and structures for writing (AFL)
Mini-lessons/tutorials on poetry – devices, structure, form, voice, meaning... (AFL)
Exploring and explaining poetic devices, structure, form, voice, meaning in others' works (AAL)
Brainstorming and prewriting webs (AAL)
Repeat drafting of poems form small group critical discussion (AAL, AFL)
Peer mentorship (AFL)
Writer's workshop with post-it reflections (AAL, AFL)
Ticket out the door on crafting with powerful language (AAL, AFL)
Peer sharing and feedback (AFL)
Revision based on feedback from peers and teachers (AFL)
Mini-writes on language, devices, techniques (AOL)
Completed spoken word poems (AOL)

Phase 4: Video Composition
Self-assessment of baseline knowledge and skills (AFL)
Video self-review and blog post of prior knowledge (AAL)
Peer or teacher video review (AFL)
Peer or teacher recital feedback (AFL)
Redrafting from critical feedback and reflection (AAL)
Daily goal on post-it (AAL, AFL)
Log of new literacy learning (AAL, AOL)
One-on-one conferences and questioning (AAL, AFL, AOL)
Reflection on daily accomplishments (AOL)
Completed video of student poem (AOL)
Blog post on growth and learning (AAL, AOL)

Phase 5: Performance Night
Preparing a reflective speech on learning (AAL, AOL)
Reflecting on video of practice speech (AAL, AFL)
One-on-one interviews and reviews on speech for improvement and revision (AFL)
Small group sharing and feedback (AFL)
Ticket out the door of biggest areas of learning (AAL, AOL)
Ticket out the door of what's needed to make even more powerful (AFL)
Blog post reflecting on the Performance Night

Depth of information and power of the speech (AOL)
Presentation and delivery of speech and video (AOL)

Phase 6: Taking a Stand
Small group critical feedback to prepare to present and share (AFL)
Creating a personalized checklist of individual needs (AAL, AFL)
Self-assessment of being prepared for publication (AFL)
Reflective v-blog post after taking a stand (AAL, AOL)
Depth of information and power of the speech (AOL)
Presentation and delivery of speech and video (AOL)

<u>**Final Thoughts**</u>:

This unit has the power to transform self and society. It engages students in personalized learning and offers them purpose by endeavouring to effect change. It turns the learning over to the student, and the teacher is able to facilitate the growth. By incorporating new literacies and digital technology, by embracing blogging, the Internet and YouTube, students' motivation is high. The students learn speaking and listening, writing and publishing while addressing multiple outcomes, and the learning tasks address solutions to real-life problems. The value in this learning is intrinsic. In my classes, this process has been an extraordinary adventure that I have been privileged to go on with my students.

Appendix B

Morning Media Moments

For this mini presentation, you will be responsible for sharing a video, webpage, link, or project of some kind that you have either created or found that connects to making social change. Ideally, you will show something to the class that might stimulate deep dialogue – questions, comments and connections to the big ideas that we are discussing in class. Aim for 20-25 minutes. We will start right at 8:30am and should wrap up around 9am.

Introduction: Start by introducing what you will show and why you have chosen it. This is up to you, but it should be about your interest and motivation and why it may connect to the class. Talk about the importance or relevance of your presentation to the class.

Body: Present…

Conclusion: Initiate a discussion with the class, perhaps by asking, "So, what do you think?" Take questions. Facilitate the dialogue without dominating it with your answers. Do not be afraid to give others the last word, as it is the dialogue and questions, themselves, more than your answers that will lead to their reflective engagement and participation. I will help if need be, but take on a leadership role that creates a stimulating and respectful environment.

Sign up for a week that you will share. Be prepared to share it on any morning that week. Schedules change and people are absent at unpredictable times. Be ready for Monday morning. Run it by me, so I may preview it and ask you about your ideas before sharing with the class.

Your Name:	Date:	Video Topic or Name:

Appendix C

Student Handout ~ Composing as a Powerful 21ˢᵗ Century Author Advocating for Social Change

The Basics:

Your task in this unit is to delve into social issues; identifying one that makes you want to stand up and speak out; and write, digitize, and perform an original Spoken Word poem to an audience. This assignment has 5 mandatory phases and one optional phase. This unit will take about 2-3 months to complete.

Phase 1 – Exposure to and dialogue about social issues

Explore social issues and develop foundational understandings. In class, we will explore a variety of topics, many of which you will raise. You will have opportunities to question, discuss, provide examples, and deepen your understanding of many social issues in dialogue with your peers. A variety of videos will be shown that exemplify issues that require transformation. At some point, you will feel compelled to do something about one of the issues. Common issues that we may explore will include the objectification of young women, racism, discrimination of people with disabilities, pollution, environmental sustainability, bullying, homophobia, and animal abuse. Certainly, you and your peers will bring up other topics and videos that can be explored.

Success indicators:

You will be able to

- Develop an understanding of key concepts such as:
  - Marginalization, oppression, objectification, injustice, power imbalance
- Contribute to collective examination of topics including:
  - Raising critical issues clearly, openly and respectfully
  - Critical and respectful questioning of peers
  - Clarifying, summarizing and synthesizing of ideas
  - Drawing upon and sharing real or hypothetical examples
  - Thinking critically about the reliability and validity of information
  - Expressing and exploring counterpoints, whether you agree or not
  - Critically analyzing video and text from a social, moral and ethical stance

Phase 2 – Inquiry into issues that require social transformation

Determine and explore the social cause for which you want to advocate. This personal exploration is based on what you feel passionate about, and focuses on a key question that has no definitive answer. It requires investigation by researching major social issues in schools, education, communities, or society in general. Investigation could involve discussions, interviews, surveys, online research, YouTube viewing, chat room participation, and observation to name just a few.

Success indicators:

You will be able to

- Demonstrate a deep awareness of social issues and reasons for taking a stand
- Make an empowering decision to investigate and defend an issue of personal importance
- Conduct an effective inquiry using a variety of sources
- Gather information and opinions for the sake of making a point
- Can validate reliable sources of information

Phase 3 – Learning spoken word poetry

Examine many YouTube videos to be able to learn about and analyze spoken word. As a community of learners, you and your peers will collect and share knowledge so that everyone becomes both a student/mentor and a collaborator of building knowledge. Opportunities will be given for practice writing/development and sharing/sample presentations with formative feedback from peers, teachers and selves (through video). Through this process, collaboration and sharing will be crucial to the development of your spoken word poem. A field trip to a slam competition would be a fantastic experience if it exists and is available. Completing the spoken word writing happens here. The timing may overlap phase one.

Success indicators:

You will be able to

- Can compose a spoken word poem that attends to the style, language, form, devices and delivery of spoken word
- Demonstrate an understanding of the connection between an author's words, intent, delivery & audience
- Critically analyze video and text from a writer/composer's stance
- Working collaboratively
- Provide and receive/utilize self and peer feedback for improvement
- Apply the writing process effectively

Phase 4 – Video composition

Develop author's digital voice by taking and editing video of an original spoken word poem. First you must complete a self-assessment on what you know and what you want to learn. Mini-lessons and peer mentorships in iMovie or MovieMaker skills, animation, stop motion and other forms of video will help you to develop a variety of skills and techniques to use as a platform for your spoken word poetry, and these will be based on what you need or want to learn. Finished products will be uploaded to YouTube and the class blog. You will blog (text, video or otherwise) or write a reflection on the process and your growth, learning and experience.

Success indicators:

You will be able to

- Can shoot video and use iMovie/MovieMaker tools to be able to craft a video effectively that demonstrates learning of new digital literacy skills
- Cross reference what you wanted or needed to learn with what was actually learned
- Successfully reflect upon growth and learning on the blog
- Successfully upload your spoken word video to YouTube and the blog

Phase 5 – Performance night

Celebrate, advocate and share. You will celebrate your accomplishments by having a performance night with an invited audience. This can include peers, family, teachers, coaches, ministers, former teachers, or anyone that you feel would enjoy the celebration of learning. Spoken word poems can be presented live or digitally.

Success Indicators:

You will be able to

- Present a completed product, whether oral or digital
- Deliver a prepared speech of what you have learned and how you have changed
- Demonstrate the techniques and presentation mode of Spoken Word
- Smile with pride on your face (do not underestimate this one)

Phase 6 – optional – Taking a stand

Make an authentic difference by advocating publicly. If you feel comfortable sharing your Spoken Word poems in front of a more targeted audience, you will present your video or perform your spoken word poems in front of the school or release your poem to the World Wide Web and target specific audiences to potentially effect change.

Success indicators:

- As Phase 5 above