

Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum of Canadian Digital Literacy Programs

Elysse Deveaux

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By: Elysse Deveaux

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Dr. Robert Pozeg Examiner

Dr. Kim Sawchuk Examiner

Dr. Carolina Cambre Thesis Supervisor(s)

Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by _____
Sandra Martin-Chang Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Pascale Sicotte

Dean Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

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Elysse Deveaux

This research project examines the hidden curriculum of current digital media literacy resources in Canadian secondary classrooms and focuses on a recent federally funded program for secondary students *CTRL-F* (pronounced control-f). Measuring the interventions against criteria for *critical intermedia pedagogy*, this project addresses three research questions:

- (1) What digital media literacy interventions are available to secondary classroom teachers in Canada, and which organisations provide them? The term intervention is used here in a broad sense, covering any pedagogical activity that is designed specifically for digital literacy.
- (2) What strategies are modelled or prescribed in the examples?
- (3) Examining the content for its hidden curriculum, what ideological messages are presented? Do the interventions reinforce binary notions of *credibility* and *fact* that constitute what Michel Foucault calls a “regime of truth”?

My results show that current resources lack the necessary critical dimensions to support analytical thinking, while also amplifying the objectivity rhetorics of mainstream journalism.

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Chapter I - Introduction

On the heels of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries selected *post-truth* as the Word of the Year (Chattopadhyay, 2016). “Post-truth has gone from being a peripheral term to being a mainstay in political commentary, now often being used by major publications with the need for clarification or definition in their headlines” (Oxford University Press, 2016). The term describes a perceived shift in public discussion where facts are less influential in shaping individual opinions than appeals to emotion or personal belief. This is not a new phenomenon but has arguably been exacerbated by social media’s ability to amplify and instantly spread false narratives. Prior to 2016, the term post-truth was used by journalists and academics to refer to the relationship between mass media and political propaganda, such as the white washing of US news coverage during the Persian Gulf War (Tesich, 1992) and the lies told by the Bush administration post 9/11 which the news media amplified as truth (Alterman, 2004; Keyes, 2004). The COVID-19 pandemic has now led to a surge in post-truth discourses across disciplines as scepticism about vaccine science and public health regulations circulate on social media platforms and trust in traditional institutions is seemingly at an all-time low. The notion of a post-truth era has led to a proliferation of education buzz-terms such as “Digital Citizenship” (Hoechsmann and DeWaard, 2015; Kozolanka and Orolowski, 2018); and empty rhetoric that describes *digital literacy* as the modern precondition for democratic citizenship (Carr et al., 2018; Peters, 2017; Giroux, 2020). Some have even gone as far to say that we are living in a world where the “facts no longer speak for themselves” (Hilton, 2019). Do facts ever speak for themselves? Should they?

Several mainstream news organisations have capitalised on post-truth’s popularity by rolling out truth and democracy-themed advertising campaigns between 2017 and 2019. Legacy

US newspapers *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* branded themselves with new slogans all accompanied by dramatic ad spots during the Super Bowl, The Academy Awards as well as online marketing: “Truth. It’s more important now than ever” was plastered on billboards with the NYT logo (Gold, 2017) and “Democracy dies in darkness” was added to *The Washington Post* masthead (Farhi, 2017). Cable news network CNN soon followed suit and began airing similar advertisements with the slogan “CNN: Facts First.” (Barr, 2017). These lucrative marketing campaigns increased digital membership to record numbers (American Marketing Association, 2018), but they also shared a common discursive trait— use of empiricist terminology truth and *fact*. Each campaign also made very emotional appeals to the viewer to position journalism as a truth machine with a singular ethical purpose. The Washington Post went so far as to claim a moral role for American democracy at large. Although holding power to account is an ideal goal, inferring that a news organisation is an arbiter of truth dangerously papers the for-profit nature of the industry and the complex nature of human bias. *News* is a product, and without a nuanced understanding of how it is produced it can easily misinform and become the antithesis of what it claims to be (Roeh and Feldman, 1984). Unfortunately, the binary logic of truth vs. *fake news* presented in these marketing strategies is actively shaping the digital literacy initiatives in K-12 classrooms.

In April of 2020, the Government of Canada announced the *Digital Citizen Contribution Program* – \$3 Million in immediate funding for organisations to “Help combat false and misleading COVID-19 information as well as the racism and stigmatisation that are often the result” (Government of Canada, Office of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, 2020). The first line of the press release read: “Now more than ever, Canadians need reliable news and information”. Two organisations that were given some of this immediate funding were

MediaSmarts and *CIVIX*– charities that produce media literacy curriculum for grades K-12. Both organisations have received a combined \$4.45M from various federal grants between 2020 and 2023. Although K-12 education is regulated by each province and territory, the few classroom resources for media education in Canada effectively come from these two charities.

Studies have shown poor to average critical reasoning skills among Canadian youth in recent years (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; MediaSmarts, 2016; Coiro et al., 2015; Bradley, 2013). Policy rhetoric unfortunately does not always reflect the pedagogical realities of the classroom. Initiatives established by the federal government in the past decade (which subsequently shape the landscape of institutional research) have been largely defined through neoliberal interests; investing in ‘skills for an evolving labour market’ as opposed to critical reasoning competencies. As a result, the field of digital literacies in the Canadian context has largely centred on technical training to meet the needs of industry, such as coding, information security and intellectual property rights (Burkell et al., 2015; SSHRC 2018). This relative lack of depth and development at the institutional level translates to an even greater lack in primary and secondary classrooms (Bradley, 2013). Digital literacy has been left to the “ad-hoc” approach of individual instructors who take charge of their own curriculum and professional development (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2008; Kist, 2004).

There are many things missing from our national approach to digital literacy (or perhaps, lack thereof), but the discursive turn in digital literacy Education towards metrics of credibility positions truth as a binary yes/no question, and often reproduces the status-quo it aims to subvert. This project evaluates the hidden curriculum of existing media and digital literacy classroom interventions available to Canadian K-12 educators; Do they foster the independent critical analytical thinking skills that are needed to navigate modern media environments? Or do they

reinforce binary notions of *credibility* and *fact* which constitute a Foucauldian “regime of truth”? Gathering the available resources, it conducts a meta-analysis using discourse analysis strategies and a bricolage of qualitative inquiry methods. This thesis evaluates the hidden curriculum of existing digital media literacy interventions in Canada. Following Jeong, Cho, and Hwang’s (2012) framework for meta-analysis, I will begin with an overview of digital media literacy policies in Canada (how it is defined by scholars, federal education initiatives and provincial curriculum material); second, synthesising how outcomes for digital literacy pedagogy are defined and measured; and third, identifying the range of individuals, groups and settings that produce and deliver curriculum. Before giving an overview of the origins of media and digital literacy policy in Canada, I position myself as a researcher and educator and provide insight into my epistemological and ontological beliefs as well as the experiences and biases that may shape my analysis (Holmes, 2020).

Coming to the Question (Positionality)

As an intermedia workshop facilitator and former curriculum resource developer with *Twenty-One Toys* I have had the privilege of working with motivated instructors who are eager to bring meaningful media education into their classrooms and educate themselves in the absence of professional development support. Unfortunately, the few accessible resources are provided by charities (that do not necessarily employ education professionals) and are stacked with board members from tech companies, hedge funds and the private sector. These resources often lack critical depth and preach neoliberal credibility metrics over building analytical thinking that can be applied to situations outside of the classroom. Teachers recognize the importance of updating their pedagogical approaches but have little time, energy or quality support to do so. These

observations in the field are what have partially motivated me to pursue graduate studies with this topic. It was my intention to conduct participatory action research in a secondary classroom where interventions could be collaboratively designed with an instructor and their students. The timing of the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to reevaluate the scope of this research, as it did not feel appropriate to add to the stress load of already overburdened teachers. During this time, crops of new digital literacy resources were funded with federal and provincial dollars that—intentionally or not—discourage critical thinking and are packed with ideological messages.

Beyond these subjective professional observations, my lived experiences have left me painfully aware of how institutions can easily obscure *facts* and participate wholeheartedly in the cycles of misinformation while pursuing profit. I am a millennial who grew up watching the Iraq war unfold on network television. A desire to understand *the truth* led me to journalism school in 2007, where I observed the structural biases of an industry that would often echo the myths and publicity statements of those in charge rather than question their veracity. These structural issues with corporate journalism during the so-called War on Terror persist today with the new proxy war between the US and Russia.

Given these social, environmental, and academic contexts that inform my positionality as a researcher, I have considered the following possible assumptions and biases throughout my research process:

- Despite having worked alongside classroom educators as a teacher, media producer and instructional designer for many years, my lack of lived experience as someone who has not taught in an official capacity in a secondary classroom.
- The assumption that current digital media literacy resources necessarily reinforce uncritical mindsets and/or hegemonic ways of thinking.

- The assumption that the apparent lack of quantitative data on approaches to digital media literacy in Canada necessarily translates to a lack of emphasis in K-12 classrooms and/or depth of skill by their instructors.
- The assumption that neoliberal considerations are the main driver of content development and delivery, due to personal experience with academic research projects in digital media literacy curriculum development for secondary students.

By acknowledging these biases and stances I hope to add transparency and intellectual honesty to the research project while rejecting any superficial claims to “objectivity” which my chosen theoretical framework– critical intermedia pedagogy– *rejects*. I wish to include my subjectivity and positionality throughout this analysis to align the goals of the project with the critical principles for which it advocates.

Chapter II - Literature Review

The following Literature Review will begin with an investigation into the origins of digital media literacy policy and instruction in Canada and flesh out the preliminary areas of exploration which will be unpacked in subsequent sections of this report. It will examine the current landscape, including barriers to development as well as critical pedagogy perspectives that seek to redress the current challenges.

Media Literacy 2.0

Digital literacy is often described as *Media Literacy 2.0* (Carr, Pluim & Howard, 2018; Silverblatt, 2014; Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2012)– a sort of pedagogical retrofit to meet the challenges brought on by the 21st century. The distinction between “media” and “digital” is simply a reflection of pedagogical responses to shifts in technology– the principles and practices of each era continue to overlap and collide (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2012). Over a decade has passed since the term emerged, yet academic discourse has not settled on a common definition of *digital literacy*, or what its pedagogy looks like in practice. Due to a proliferation of other related literacies– web literacy, e-literacy, computer literacy, etc., *digital literacy* has become the default umbrella term for a range of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies related to the use of “texts, tools and technologies” (Hobbs, 2014, p.480). There is a substantial amount of literature that discusses the use of interactive games or computer-based instruction to enhance science reasoning and traditional literacy skills (Sanford & Madill, 2007; Jenson & Droumeva, M, 2017; van Daal, Sandvik & Adèr, 2019) that argue in favour of technology in the classroom, but do not discuss media education as a distinct subject. Technology is frequently equated with enhanced literacy, but a common limitation for reports in the literature is their relatively short observation period (Hobbs, 2014).

The only semblance of an international standard for assessing digital literacy comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which relies on data collected via the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, which asks 15-year-olds to identify if they have been “taught digital literacy and well-being” in the following areas:

- (1) How to use keywords when using a search engine
- (2) How to decide whether to trust information from the Internet
- (3) To understand the consequences of making information publicly available online
- (4) How to detect whether the information is subjective or biased
- (5) How to detect phishing or spam emails

(PISA 2018 as cited in Statistics Canada, 2020, p.144)

Table 1: Percentage of 15-year-old students who reported having been taught digital literacy and wellbeing, by skill, OECD, Canada. Provinces, 2018					
Group	SKILL 1 How to use keywords when using a search engine such as Google®, Yahoo®, etc.	SKILL 2 How to decide whether to trust information from the Internet	SKILL 3 To understand consequences of making information publicly available online	SKILL 4 How to detect whether the information is subjective or biased	SKILL 5 How to detect phishing or spam emails
OECD Average	56	69	76	55	41
Canada Average	62	79	81	70	38
Alberta	54	70	86	64	30
British Columbia	58	74	74	67	37
Manitoba	52	75	79	65	29
Newfoundland	56	72	78	61	40
New Brunswick	53	69	76	53	30

Nova Scotia	63	82	83	75	40
Ontario	69	80	80	68	42
Prince Edward Island	69	82	81	73	45
Quebec	66	80	83	81	41
Saskatchewan	68	85	85	74	43
Source: Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2018					

Table 1 shows a provincial breakdown of the results for 2018. The “skill” category which reported the highest instruction rates (81%) is “understanding the consequences of making information publicly available on i.e., Facebook, Instagram, etc” (Statistics Canada, 2020, p.131). This category was closely followed by “How to decide whether to trust information from the internet” (79%). As subject headings, the five indicators of the IEA survey appear to cover a broad range of topics; but few details about the content and context of digital media literacy education in Canada can be inferred from a dichotomous survey. These statistics should also be taken with a grain of salt, as international education bodies such as PISA and the OECD are often criticized for serving the neoliberal interests of governments and multinational corporations (Abdi, Shultz & Pillay, 2015). However, rigorous data at a national or provincial level is scarce. Apart from the biennial PISA statistics, which only began collecting data on digital literacy rates in 2016, *MediaSmarts* is the only consistent source of data on media education in Canada for the past two decades. Between 2012 and 2022, the organisation published 16 surveys¹ which sample the perspectives of thousands of students, parents, and teachers. Topics have included cyberbullying (Steeves, 2014b), sexuality in the digital age (Steeves, 2014f) and the use of

¹ See Steeves, 2012a; 2012b; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; Johns & Froese-Germain, 2016; Brisson-Boivin, 2019; Steeves et al., 2020; McAleese & Johnson, 2020; Brisson-Boivin et al., 2021; MediaSmarts, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c.

technology in the classroom (Johnson & Froese-Germain, 2016). The majority of these surveys are student-focused and do not include substantive details about what digital literacy pedagogy looks like in their classrooms, or if the self-reported “skills” are measurably effective in the real world. A 2014 *MediaSmarts* survey of 5,436 students in grades 4-11 appears to be the only quantitative data on digital literacy skills published in Canada over the past decade. Similar to the PISA survey, it asked students if they had been taught particular categories of skills: how to search for information online (92%); how to tell if online information is “true” (80%); how to use privacy settings (82%); how to understand how companies collect and use personal information online (66%); and how to know what is legal or illegal to do online (83%) (Steeves, 2014a, p.36). The survey also found that students attempt to verify online information for schoolwork at relatively high rates (71%) but are least likely to verify something they encounter on a social media site in passing (56%). This signals a breakdown between strategies that are taught inside the vacuum of assessment and students’ ability to apply this instruction in the real world (Slomp et al., 2018). Although *MediaSmarts* surveys cover a wider range of topics and questions, they are also self-reported and dichotomous. They also tend to paint a rosier picture of students’ digital literacy skills than what is observed by their teachers, and most importantly their *librarians*.

Cara Bradley (2013), Research and Scholarship Librarian at the University of Regina, points out that students are frequently given the “basics” on digital literacy but are rarely able to move beyond this cursory instruction to develop the information skills that would “enrich their lives” (pg.13). Bradley also suggests that the policy language of provincial and territorial media literacy policies is too general to be effective and draws a parallel between curriculum policy scope and common information literacy models which tend to over-simplify complex cognitive

processes (Budd, 2009; Webber and Johnston, 2000). Scholars from the critical tradition agree that rather than *acquiring* information, digital literacy must focus on *assessing* information with critical reasoning skills (Low, Salvio & Brushwood-Rose, 2017; Bradley, 2013). Simplistic teaching about media has proven to have no meaningful impact, and effective curriculum must involve carefully planned and targeted interventions (McCanon, 2014).

Current Media Literacy Policies in Canada

Canada lags in promoting digital literacy or even settling on a definition (Hadziristic, 2017), yet media education scholars continue to reference past policy achievements in media literacy education as evidence of Canada's leadership in the field (Federov, Livitskaya and Camarero, 2016; Silverblatt, 2014; Tsvietkova et al., 2020). Ontario was the first educational jurisdiction in North America to incorporate media literacy into the mandated curriculum in 1989 (Selby and Goldstein, 2000). The *Media Literacy Resource Guide* was produced by a group of teachers and media professionals known as the *Association for Media Literacy* (AML)— which remains in operation to this day. The “Key Concepts” in this guide drew heavily from the work of early Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan, as well as the work of Australian media educator Ken Masterman:

- (1) all media are constructions.
- (2) the media construct versions of reality.
- (3) audiences negotiate meaning in media.
- (4) media have commercial implications.
- (5) media contain ideological messages.
- (6) media have social and political implications.

(7) form and content are closely related in media.

(8) each medium has unique aesthetic forms.

(Andersen, Duncan and Pugente, 1999, p.141)

Slightly modified versions of the 1989 concepts are still referenced in the ELA policy documents for Ontario throughout grades 1-10², New Brunswick grades 9-12³ and Nova Scotia grades 10-12⁴. The work of the AML sparked a nation-wide movement of media education initiatives and by the late 1990s every region in Canada had a media literacy organisation except for the northern territories. Of those original nine groups, only two remain in operation– the AML and *MediaSmarts*. Established in 1994 as the *Media Awareness Network*, *MediaSmarts* is the only consistent producer of classroom resources for media education in North America, and international scholarship often points to its longevity and ongoing federal funding as testament to Canada’s commitment to media education. Unfortunately, as Director of Education for *MediaSmarts* Matthew Johnson points out, past policy commitments have failed to evolve with our modern digital realities, or amount to anything more than a few sentences pasted into provincial curriculum documents (Owen, 2020). As the (self)-credited architects of media literacy curriculum in Canada (Barry Duncan and John Pugente) warned nearly two decades ago, policy declarations alone are not enough to achieve the learning outcomes outlined by these curricular mandates (Pugente, 2002). Canada has failed to uphold its previous commitments and modernise the curriculum to fit the needs of the current digital generation (Gallagher, & Rowsell, 2018).

² See Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.154; 2007, p.115

³ See New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 1998, p.173

⁴ See Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1997, p.152

Only five of the thirteen provinces and territories⁵ have policies that refer directly to media or digital literacy– Ontario (ON), Newfoundland (NFLD), Nova Scotia (NS), New Brunswick (NB) and Prince Edward Island (PEI). Some provinces offer elective courses in media production at the secondary level, but no mandatory instruction exists outside of the language arts curriculum in English or French. The term “Digital literacy” appears only twice across 80 ELA policy documents: Once as a bullet point under the heading of “Information Literacy: Research Processes, Skills and Strategies” for NS grades 4-6⁶; And as a boilerplate “elaboration” for “Reading and Viewing” competencies for PEI grades 7-12 that amount to six sentences:

Digital literacy must be addressed here. Digital literacy refers to ‘knowing how to learn.’ It refers to the development of processing and searching skills to find the data required: addressing information reliability and validity, documenting sources, and avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism should be a key area to discuss. Teachers should reinforce the importance of crediting sources of information and also discuss the consequences of plagiarism.

(Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, 2021. p.41)

The Atlantic provinces share a lot of overlap in content and structure, to the point that entire sections of policy text are identical. This is likely due to the maritime provinces collaboration on policies during the 1990s under the banner of *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum*. Although each province has since branched off into updating

⁵ The territories of Yukon and Nunavut do not produce their own curriculum policies– Yukon follows the British Columbia curriculum and Nunavut follows Northwest Territories and Alberta curriculums for Grades K-8 and 10-12, respectively.

⁶ See *Nova Scotia English Language Arts 4-6* (Nova Scotia, 2014, p.396)

policies at their own pace, the language and content from these original 1997 documents often shows up in more recent policy iterations, and in some cases remains the primary ELA policies. For example, NB's policy for grades K-3 (p.228) and 4-6 (p.184), PEI grades K-3 (p.228) and 4-6 (p.184) are identical documents and thus contain the same paragraph on media literacy:

The Role of media literacy: The influence of media, such as TV, film, videos, magazines, computer games, and popular music, is pervasive in the lives of students today. It is important therefore, that beginning in the primary grades, students learn to use media resources critically and thoughtfully. Media literacy is a form of critical thinking that is applied to the message being sent by the mass media. In the primary grades, students can begin to develop media literacy by asking themselves questions such as the following: What is the message? Who is sending the message? Why is the message being sent? How is the message being sent? Who is the intended audience? Students make sense of media messages based on their prior knowledge and experiences. After considering their personal connections, they can learn to analyse and evaluate the ideas, values, techniques, and contexts of media messages. Media literacy activities should be integrated into the curriculum.

Despite this regional overlap in policy language, there is little consistency or logic to the subject holistically. For example, policies for PEI grades K-3 and 4-6 (both produced in the late 1990s) contain standard blurbs about media literacy, but the subject is missing entirely from the policies for grades 7-12 (all produced in 2021). This suggests that while the subject may be given a token acknowledgement in the elementary school years it is not mandatory at the secondary

level. In another example, NB's K-3⁷ and 9-12⁸ ELA policy documents contain identical sections on media literacy without any differentiation between learning outcomes between the lower and higher grade levels. This implies no pedagogical differentiation is necessary for media literacy instruction between kindergarten and grade 12.

Ontario is the only province to identify specific learning outcomes for media literacy at each grade level which are designed to be scaffolded from one year to the next. In fact, media literacy is a core “strand” of the ELA curriculum along with reading, writing and oral communication (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.5; 2007, p.9). The media literacy strand outlines four general outcome areas, with grade-specific sub-outcomes outlined for each:

The media literacy strand has four overall expectations, as follows. Students will: 1. demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts; 2. identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning; 3. create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques; 4. reflect on and identify their strengths, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p.14)

Ontario's media literacy curriculum policies have not been updated since 2007, yet they continue to be the most robust in Canada. Each grade level carries 14 standard “expectation categories” for media literacy along with grade-specific learning outcomes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, pp.147-49).

⁷ See New Brunswick Department of Early Childhood Education, 1998a, p.228

⁸ Ibid., 1998a, p.173

References to *media* are common throughout all Canadian ELA policies, but most often as a modality of text comprehension, rather than its own definitive subject. Looking at Alberta's policy for grades K-9, "media text" appears over 300 times, but the document does not contain any reference to media or digital literacy: "General Outcome Statement: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts" (Alberta Education, 2000, p.16). Similarly, Manitoba has five ELA policy documents which contain over 200 instances of the term *media text* but treats the term as a mode of more traditional textual forms that operate within similar parameters of analysis.

In the ELA curriculum, the word text refers to the variety of resources that we use to make meaning. These include aural/oral, visual, print, digital, physical, gestural, and spatial texts, and the various combinations of these. For example, a news video could have gestural, oral, visual, and print components simultaneously. Many different objects are imbued with meaning and used for different purposes depending on how people create or attend to them.

(Government of Manitoba, 2020, p.5)

The same can be said for the ELA policies of Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories. Exactly one quarter (20) of the ELA policies refer to media or digital literacy in some manner, although these are often limited to brief paragraphs couched in rhetorical language that fail to articulate any concrete learning outcomes. For example, Quebec's 43-page ELA policy document for Cycle One (grades 7 and 8) refers to media literacy, but only in passing as a "cross-curricular competency":

By looking carefully at the key features of the cross-curricular competencies, teachers will find many ways to link learning in the SELA (Secondary English Language Arts) program to learning across the curriculum. In order to make connections between language, discourse and texts and the issues and concerns of the young, the broad areas of learning provide topics and issues that invite interdisciplinary study and exploration, including media literacy, citizenship and community life, and environmental awareness.

(Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur du Québec, 2019)

The lack of specific learning objectives in policy documentation for K-12 reflects the neoliberal funding initiatives that have shaped the landscape of education and institutional research in Canada. Such initiatives have been co-opted to sell what Trifonas (2018) calls a “technocratic education” which emphasises mastery of technical skills over critical thinking. This has led to a focus on *skills for an evolving labour market* largely centred on technical training for the information technology economy (Burkell et al., 2015; SSHRC 2018). The bulk of funding for these initiatives goes to the post-secondary level, usually as research grants, or to private groups and non-profits. If this funding does make its way to K-12, it is often via charities which are stacked with corporate boards of directors looking to get a head start on training future workers. For example, Toronto-based charity *Kids Code Jeunesse* (KCJ) offers free training workshops and online resources for teachers interested in teaching their students to code. The group receives up to \$8M in federal funding each year, as well as corporate funding (16% of its operating budget) from Google, Amazon, Microsoft, TikTok and a slew of software companies like Ubisoft and EA. It also has a board of directors that includes a hedge fund manager, CEO of

a software firm and a recruitment officer for SNC-Lavalin– the Canadian multinational engineering firm which works primarily in mining, oil, and gas (Kids Code Jeunesse, 2022). Although technical skills are an important element of digital literacy, there is a tendency to equate using technology with literacy or proficiency. Rigorous and quantifiable research relating to digital literacy interventions from the past decade most often measures (1) student access to technology (2) use of digital games or other computer-based resources to enhance instruction of core subjects such as math, science or reading.

What does a less techno-centric approach to media education look like? Media literacy was always meant to be *critical* in a Freirean sense. Beginning with Marshall McLuhan in the 1960's, the various incarnations of media literacy in the US and Canada have at least shared the common theoretical goal of exploring the constructed nature of media and highlighting their social, political, and ideological impacts through critical reflection (Pugente and O'Malley, 1999). Unfortunately, pedagogy that is described by thought leaders is separate from the reality of what plays out in classrooms. The emergence of Critical Media Pedagogy (CMP), as advocated by Kellner and Share (2005), was a response to barriers of the 1990s which manifested as “protectionist” attitudes that sought to “inoculate” young people from the ill-effects of mass media— consumerism, irrational beauty standards, and desensitisation to violence (p.372). This school of thought teaches students to view all media as representations that are created in a complex web of power dynamics, but also stresses the agentic dimension of media for self-expression and social activism. Critical media pedagogy advocates for thoughtful decoding of media texts as well as critical approaches to media production which serve social justice goals and gives voice to counter-narratives. All media involve dynamics of representation, production, and reception. Asking critical questions can bring these dynamics to

light. It is an approach to teaching and learning rooted heavily in Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy, that education should seek to make explicit the existing social hierarchies and structural inequalities by legitimating more varied sources of knowledge, including marginalised voices (Morrell et al., 2013; Wiggins, 2011; Ball). Rather than a passive inculcation of rhetoric, education is an active search for meaning and understanding that is constantly in flux. These pedagogical values echo Alfred North Whitehead's concept of "process philosophy" and the idea that school should be an *affective* environment which preserves the connection between knowledge and "zest for life" (Shaviro, 2007; Tamboukou, 2016). *Affect* is a philosophical term that emphasises the embodied knowledge that comes about through experience. Interpreted through an educational lens, affect can be applied to motivation, interest, or attention, but speaks to the broader role of emotions and environment involved in the way humans learn, as learning inherently connected to the emotional realm (Jansen, 2009, Zembaylas, 2012). As interdisciplinary scholar Sara Ahmed (2004) states: "Emotions are not simply 'within' or 'without' but ...they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (p.17). Meaning making and the "articulation of the somatic" are fundamentally entangled processes (Wetherell, 2013, p.353). To meaningfully build their knowledge (and put it into practice in the real world) students must be emotionally provoked by the methods and subjects they study, or in the words of Hannah Arendt, "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it" (Tamboukou, 2016, p.136).

The conceptual paradigm that embodies an education *love for the world* is post-critical pedagogy, which seeks to empower students and communities through a philosophical re-orientation of practice towards citizenship, social justice, and sustainability. "Educational hope is about the possibility of a renewal of our common world" (Hodgson and Zamojski, 2018, pg.18).

It is a call for a philosophical renewal of practice that transcends the “pessimism” of traditional critical pedagogy (Stack and Kelly, 2006); to highlight what is *meaningfully* educational in practice and motivates students to take responsibility for the world around them.

What does a philosophical approach of educational hope look like in the K-12 classroom? Renowned Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg (2014) stresses the importance of helping students “become who they are” rather than training them to perform a behaviour or regurgitate facts. Beyond simply finding out what resonates with a student on a personal level, the goal is to redress the power dynamics of teaching and learning altogether. Christopher Emdin refers to this as “reality pedagogy”— an approach whose primary goal is meeting each student on his or her own “cultural and emotional turf” (2016, pg.33). This involves “co-teaching” and a co-structuring of the classroom space that positions students as equal stakeholders in the pursuit and design of their own learning. When authority figures turn instruction into an equal partnership, students feel a sense of empowerment that can allow them to “take responsibility” for their own learning (Adjapong and Emdin, 2015; Lave and Wenger, 1991; John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996). Critical media educators view their role not as that of an expert of one medium, rather a role model for enacting critical thinking strategies. Enabling students to ask provocative kinds of questions about the media they engage with “for fun” in turn primes their curiosity and critical inquiry skills for future applications. Using popular media as “pedagogical bridges” is not a new concept (Sholle & Denski, 1993, p. 307), yet the level of interactive complexity of new media opens new dimensions for teaching and learning. The move from critical to post-critical is not a rejection of these philosophies, but a recognition that how we teach something is just as crucial as “what” we decide to teach. It is an invitation to reimagine pedagogy and to subvert the power dynamics of the traditional classroom. Echoing Paulo Freire— Low, Salvio & Brushwood-Rose

(2017) argue that the ideal of a teacher as an all-knowing epistemic authority “while seductive, is based on an illusion” (p.vi).

Critical Intermedia Pedagogy

It is here that I will draw a distinction between the foundational principles of critical media pedagogy (influenced heavily by the critical pedagogy of the 1990s) and critical *intermedia* pedagogy, a post-critical elaboration that combines elements of critical discourse analysis and intermediality (which will form the base criteria for the meta-analysis in the coming section). The difference is a matter of philosophical scale. Critical media pedagogy positions the teacher as an individual who must “lift the veil” of ignorance— in technical skill, in knowledge, etc.— which adheres to the institutional tradition of an authoritative knowledge-keeper who decides what veil to lift, and how. Critical intermedia pedagogy repositions the instructor as a co-learner in pursuit of student-defined learning goals that evolves with the needs and interests of a given classroom. Most importantly, critical intermedia pedagogy pursues a holistic application across subjects, rather than selectively applying critical thought to isolated subjects. By engaging multiple texts and sources on any given subject, students concretize an awareness of how knowledge operates within a larger system, instead of becoming passive receivers meaning from a singular, authoritative sources. At all learning levels, engaging multiple texts is critical for activating a schema for later processing of context (Wineberg, 1991). Unfortunately, elementary, and secondary students are accustomed to textbooks and course materials from monolithic or undeclared sources that take rhetorical and authoritative stances which consequently impede deeper topic understanding. The term “multimedia” is a nebulous concept that is appropriated in different ways across disciplines. It can refer to the incorporation of audio-visual media as a

heuristic supplement to existing curriculum (Luke, 2003); or be used as a generic term for digital or analogue technology (Carter et al., 2014). However, as Elleström (2010) points out, “multimedia” is a multimodal approach to teaching which explores a single topic using one medium at a time. In contrast, *intermediality* seeks to develop dynamic learning modalities across mediums, contexts and disciplines for the development of critical literacies. Although it generally refers to the blurring of boundaries between mediums (Schroter, 2011), or “intertextuality” (Kristeva, 1980; Sturken and Cartwright, 2001), intermediality as a pedagogical concept describes the “varied processes to access, construct, connect, and analyse texts” in order to understand “their shifting meanings, and the cultural contexts in which they are produced” (Semaili and Pailliotet, 2018, pg.4-7). The goal is to critically explore the connections between students' personal experiences and their everyday encounters with digital media (connected to critical pedagogy’s philosophy of student-centred approach). Ideally students build an understanding of how multiple sources and pieces of information inform each other. In this way, by engaging multiple texts and sources on any given subject, they are enabled in a process to concretize awareness of how information is constructed within a larger system, as opposed to being positioned as passively receiving meaning from a singular, or isolated source. At all learning levels, engaging multiple texts is critical for activating a schema for later processing of context (Wineberg, 1991). Elementary and secondary students are accustomed to textbooks and course materials from monolith or undeclared sources that take rhetorical and authoritative stances which consequently impede deeper topic comprehension (Bråten, Strømsø, & Britt, 2009, p.22).

Critically processing the context of a subject or source requires *in-depth lateral reading strategies* that triangulate information within and across tiers and texts (Metzger & Flanagin,

2015; Shanahan, Shanahan & Misischia, 2011). This involves identifying genre characteristics, rhetorical devices and the discourse communities at play (Beaufort, 2008). For example, asking Who or what is the source? How does the language address the audience? What claims are made? What greater context can it be connected to? Answering these questions requires lateral reading, which are designed for building and articulating metacognitive knowledge. “The act of reflecting on learning and of thinking about how to apply that learning in future situations develops critical habits of mind and independence” (Slomp et al., 2018). In a sense, lateral reading is a problem-solving task that involves more than triangulating or corroborating information- but also revealing the hidden dynamics of representation at play. Power is not simply “coercion”, or domination of one over the other; it requires a degree of complicity from the ruled (Innis, 1951). This complicity is generated through elite production of knowledge and control of information (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Modern Truth Regimes

The relationship between knowledge and power may not be linear but is inherently symbiotic. In “Orientalism Reconsidered”, Edward Said (1985) asks, “how can knowledge that is non-dominative, non-coercive be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, considerations, the positions, the strategies of power?” (p.91). For Foucault, it requires a shift from the “political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” towards a new “politics of truth” that is modelled on scientific discourse (1976, pp. 13-14). However, Said saw the limits of this thinking in his own context, questioning the right of Western disciplines to talk about ‘the Orient’ with academic authority—lumping unrepresented people into an artificial group—essentially speaking ‘for’ them in domains that exclude them politically and intellectually

(Said, 1985, pp.90-91). Rather than attempting a purely scientific *politics of truth*, Said emphasised the need for a diversity of counter-discourses and knowledges that work to challenge the dominant regime. Going beyond a pure scientific reasoning, it wishes to de-centre knowledge from the notion of authority and objectivity altogether (Said, 1985, pp.105-06). He makes an important point about interpretation; if we accept that literary texts such as Shakespeare's can be interpreted several ways throughout history and across readership, then all texts must spring from communities of interpretation subject to their own biases and methodological choices.

Knowledge requires multiple entry points and perspectives. Counter-discursive knowledge is in direct agitation with the mainstream; the result of multiple planes of activity and praxis, rather than a sovereign authority of consistency, canonicity, and "science" (Said, 1985, p.106). It requires a political and methodological commitment to the "dismantling of systems of domination" that we collectively maintain.

Weir (2008) argues that modern regimes of truth are far more heterogeneous than Foucault's definition implies. Science, governance, religion/politics, and common culture — knowledges that have distinct histories and relations to power— co-exist and sometimes vie for dominance. "Given the multiplicity of truth formulae, their relations to governance and sovereign power are heterogeneous rather than inevitably enhancing power. If truth is not singular, then neither is its relation to power" (Weir, 2008, p.385). Weir's elaboration of Foucault provides a more nuanced frame to explore digital literacy in the "post-truth" era. Professing a disciplinary commitment to empirical truth is something Foucault and Said categorically reject. Neither are attempting to argue against reality, but are simply defining knowledge, fact"— or *truth* with a capital "t"— as the material product of connections between meaning and language. Anything deemed *knowledge* or *truth* is simply a "system of ordered procedures for the production,

regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements” (Foucault, 1976, p.14). “Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*. And meanings shape and influence what we do -our conduct -all practices have a discursive aspect” (Hall, 1992, p. 291).

Following Foucault, cultural studies giant Stuart Hall asks “What are the rules and practices that have produced meaningful statements and regulated discourses in different historical periods?” (1997, p.291). These same questions drive the pedagogical imperatives of critical intermedia pedagogy, which is incompatible with the “banking” model of education that neoliberal policies have built into K-12 education. The institution as it exists today seeks to *transmit* knowledge as siloed subjects, taught by classroom teachers that are positioned as *experts* in any given subject that rely on authoritative sources of information. Shifting away from this institutional philosophy comes down to individual instructors.

Educators as Activists

The idea that education should be a counter-hegemonic force is often attributed to Antonio Gramsci, a pioneer of critical theory. His concept of an “organic intellectual” is an idea that is taken up by many education theorists who interpret the role of such intellectuals in several ways, ranging from ‘public intellectual’ with a simple mandate of translating ones’ knowledge for a non-specialized audience (Hall, 1992) to ‘activist’ that actively promotes working class solidarity and counter-hegemonic ideas (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001). Building on Burawoy’s (2005) notion of an “organic public sociologist” (p.265) Apple outlines structured principles of a critical sociology of education, which he refers to as “tasks” (Apple, 2013, p.207). First and foremost, it must “bear witness to negativity”; to illuminate the ways in which

educational policy and practice are connected to the relations of exploitation and domination of society as a whole (p.208). It must also point to contradictions and to spaces of possible action, emphasising the methods and spaces in which counter-hegemonic actions occur, while critically examining current realities with a conceptual/political framework. It must act as a critical ‘secretary’ to those groups of people and social movements who challenge existing relations of unequal power and simultaneously work in progressive ways. The goal, as Gramsci argued nearly a century ago, is not to throw out ‘elite knowledge’ but to reconstruct its form and content so that it serves genuinely progressive social needs. It must *participate* in and give one’s expertise to movements involved in transforming politics and society, which implies learning from these social movements, detached from the established “intelligentsia.”

Situating teachers as what Lipsky (1980/2010) refers to as “street-level bureaucrats” offers insight into an overlooked dimension of education. Interpretive policy studies focus on the sense-making mechanism of actors in the field– identifying which policy elements carry or convey meaning, who designs them and how they are communicated (Yanow, 2007). The interpretive policy process differs from the more traditional, empiricist forms of analysis which Yanow describes as more linear and “technical-rational.” These approaches tend to ignore the social realities and lived experiences of policy actors (pg.118). Teachers are the front-line of policy implementation– they “adapt rather than adopt” policies (Blignaut, 2005). They ultimately have control over what is taught in their classrooms, and they influence the behavioural and meaning-making responses of their students. This moral and ideological component of teaching and learning is commonly known as the *hidden* curriculum (Giroux, 1978) or “collateral learning” (Dewey, 1916/2001).

The informal categories that individuals and institutions rely on to make sense of their

everyday experiences reveal larger stories about the culture's moral order; that is our routine "common-sense" language emerges as a hegemonic manifestation of the underlying hierarchical power relations that we accept, legitimise, or reject.

(Parameswaren, 2006, pg.48)

These informal categories as described by cognitive linguist George Lakoff (1996) are more than simple patterns of thought– they have material impacts on bodies and subjectivities. For many sociologists, curriculum is a mechanism of social control - an explicit oppression of the lower classes which serves and entrenches elite power (Freire, 1970; Vallance, 1974; Portelli, 1993). Public education as an ideological state apparatus in North America reinforces obedience (Lynch, 1989) and white supremacy (Fanon; Di Lissovoy, 2012; Coulthard, 2014) and consumerism (Iannacci, 2011). Research into the cognitive sense-making of teachers with respect to media education policies in Canada is sparse. One 2014 survey of 286 pre-service teacher candidates found a significant gap between their general "media awareness" versus concrete "media literacy competencies" (Carr, Plum and Howard, 2015, pp.6-7). Between 82-90% of respondents "agreed" that media literacy should be a core subject of the curriculum but were not able to demonstrate a grasp of media literacy as a pedagogical subject when asked to elaborate. A body of research addresses how the subject should be approached, philosophically, but does not examine how teachers translate policy rhetoric into their classrooms (Jolls and Wilson, 2014). Most K-12 classroom teachers in Canada receive just three days of professional development per school year, which are focused on core subjects– math, science and general language arts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). With little-to-no professional support, teachers have been left to their own devices and "ad-hoc" approaches when teaching media

literacy (Kist, 2004). Educators recognize the potential of digital media and technology in the classroom, but they have a lot of catching up to do (Semali & Pailliotet, 2018, pg.10). In the absence of professional development support from the respective provincial education bodies, the gaps are often filled with ready-made materials from outside parties.

Popular pay-for-play lesson plan platforms such as *Teachers Pay Teachers* have come under fire for using unvetted material that has little pedagogical value, or worse, contains racist and plagiarised content (Schwartz, 2018; Shelton et al., 2020). These sites remain exceedingly popular in both Canada and the United States. In this literal marketplace of lessons, teachers often choose the content based on ease of use and enjoyment, not quality of the pedagogical outcomes they produce (Gallagher, Swalwell and Bellows, 2019). For example, Toronto-based Anishinaabe/Ojibwe educator and author Jenny Kay Dupis has had lesson plans for her children's book "I Am Not A Number" appear on these prefab lesson sites. The book tells a fictionalised account about her grandmother's experience in residential schools. Dupuis found these lessons - created by non-Indigenous teachers - lacked cultural sensitivity and ultimately did harm to the intention of the story while profiting off the work of an Indigenous creator (Noonoo, 2021).

Chapter III - Research Questions

Given that our national approach to media education (or perhaps, lack thereof):

1. relies on a handful of charities for curriculum providing one-off lessons.
2. Is heavily influenced by neoliberal discourses and approaches.

I suspect the available Canadian digital media literacy resources for K-12 fall short of a Critical Intermedia framework. As curriculum theorist William Pinar (2004) states, exposing the hidden curriculum is the educational task we must perform “in order to create passages out of and away from the stasis of the historical present” (p.39). Consequently, the following questions guide this investigation:

- (4) What Digital media literacy interventions are available to K-12 classroom teachers in Canada, and which organisations provide them? The term intervention is used here in a broad sense, covering any pedagogical activity that is designed specifically for digital literacy.
- (5) What strategies are modelled or prescribed in the examples? Which themes are self-stated, and which are revealed through repetition?
- (6) Examining the content for its hidden curriculum, what ideologies are being enforced? Do the interventions or heuristics reinforce binary notions of “credibility” and “fact” that constitute a “regime of truth”?

Chapter IV - Methodology and Methods

Methodology: Interpretive Qualitative Meta-Analysis

This research project gathers reported examples of classroom interventions in the academic literature, provincial education departments and third-party content that is designed for Canadian digital media literacy education. A discursive, categorical, and critical analysis of the content will be performed—drawing from the disciplines of education sociology, media studies and critical theory. The overarching goal of this meta-analysis is to “broaden the base of studies in some way, expand the question, and study the pattern of answers” (Borenstein et al., 2009, p.21). This approach relies on Denzin’s (2017) philosophy of interpretive qualitative inquiry (which rejects neo-liberal auditing procedures), and Quinn-Patton’s (2014) view of all methodology as necessarily “creative” and dependant on the needs of the analysis (pg.763). I will compare the approaches of the existing interventions with criteria for critical intermedia pedagogy: Focus on lived experience (autobiographical connection to students); Engagement of multiple texts; Use of in-depth lateral reading strategies; Discussion of power and dynamics of representation. As discussed in the previous chapter, these criteria are a synthesis of best practices as reported by scholars in Canada and abroad. The analysis, however, will be limited to reported interventions in Canada to emphasize the importance of curricula that establishes meaningful autobiographical connections with students. This is a crucial element of critical intermedia pedagogy, which objects to standardised transmission models for learning.

Data Collection:

The preliminary criteria for data collection is broad: reports of any classroom intervention (K-12) or lesson plan related to media or digital literacy in Canada between 2012 and 2022.

Limiting the time frame is an acknowledgement of the recent and unprecedented explosion of social media and digital communication, which require entirely new approaches to teaching and learning. Many of the resources that predate this digital shift are woefully inadequate for today's classroom. The first phase of collection looks for reported interventions in the academic literature. To be sure, this required sifting through thousands of journal articles and book chapters, first eliminating any authorship that is not produced in Canada or by a Canadian, and then scanning the remaining reports for evidence that a classroom intervention had been conducted or proposed. The second phase examines any provincial and territorial curriculum resources that support media literacy education in any way (where available). The third and final collection phase looks at Canadian organisations that produce classroom resources. This yielded the most data for analysis, as I will elaborate further below.

Data Collection Phase 1: Reported Interventions in the Academic Literature

To get a sense of the current media literacy curriculum in Canadian classrooms (and any analysis thereof), I sought out descriptions of interventions under the umbrella of media/digital/critical literacy in Canada in the 10-year time frame outlined above. General database searches yield several reports from the United States and abroad, but unfortunately adequate Canadian examples are scarce. Many abstracts claim to describe interventions, but ultimately lacked adequate detail for analysis (Bennett, 2012; van Kessel, 2017; Lenters, 2018).

For example, Cooper & White (2012) claim to provide an overview of a school-wide action research project on critical thinking and literacy at the elementary level. The desired outcomes of this “3-year longitudinal study” are broadly framed– “to develop critical literacy capacity among the teachers and the entire research team” specifically, “accounting for what

critical thinking means and looks like in an actual classroom for at-risk youth” (p.45). Yet the authors fail to provide much insight into what this looked like in a classroom, apart from a passing example: “In order to progress to critical literacy from the vantage-point of thinking critically, the following questions were asked of the Grade 3 students, the teachers of whom were now part of the research team: Why do people read? What do you see readers doing? Where do you see people reading? Do people all over the world have the same chance to learn to read?” (p.51). Despite claims of developing a “school-wide” curriculum, this study is limited to drafting a “Commitment to Literacy” policy along with voluntary participation in professional development seminars with academic researchers. A single grade three classroom participated in the entire duration of the study. The report concludes by focusing on a discussion between two teachers about differences between *critical thinking* and *critical literacy* but does not elaborate beyond the following: “Through the definition of terms such as these, the teachers and researchers in this project began to understand the complex and recursive relationship between language and power evidenced in the twin processes of critical thinking and critical literacy” (p.53). None of the four indicators for critical intermedia pedagogy indicated above are present in this report, as it appears very little was done to stage classroom interventions. Real-world examples are not considered, lateral reading strategies are not discussed. Any discussion about power relations is limited to platitudes about critical literacy and democratic education.

Substantive descriptions of lesson plans or reports of classroom interventions in peer-reviewed journals are difficult to find. Although the literature review underscores a lack of attention to this topic in Canada, it is nevertheless shocking to discover the dearth of reported interventions over the past two decades.

Scanning through the table of contents for each issue of the most prominent Canadian education research journals between January 2012 and May 2022⁹ yields mostly theoretical manifestos that attempt to outline the contours of the problem, including what philosophical *principles* should guide media literacy going forward (Kozolanka & Orlowski, 2018; Carr, Hoechsmann and Thésée, 2018; Forzani, Corrigan and Slomp, 2020). The limited amount of literature that directly discusses this topic pushed me to seek out descriptions of *any* classroom activity that could be considered critical intermedia pedagogy but disguised with a different framing or vernacular. Unfortunately, this search did not yield any additional reports or examples that meet the timeframe and grade-specific criteria for this analysis. Although still quite limited in number, reported interventions were most often designed for post-secondary students (Carr, Pluim & Howard, 2015; Wittebols, 2020). Carr, Pluim & Howard conduct a longitudinal survey of media literacy awareness and competency levels of pre-service teachers, but also describe two activities “for teacher candidates to experiment with and develop their own sense of media literacy that they can ultimately pass on to their students” (p.13). The descriptions are broad but contain three of the four key markers of critical intermedia pedagogy outlined above. Activity 1 is student-centred, providing a critical framework of questions to unpack bias in news media. It poses questions about whose perspectives are being delivered by the news and which are being *manufactured* in a Chomskyan sense. Dividing students into groups, each one would choose a

⁹ Canadian Journal of Education;
 Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning;
 Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology;
 Canadian Journal for Action Research;
 Canadian Journal for Science, Math and Technology Education;
 Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice research;
 McGill Journal of Education;
 Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research (Athabasca University);
 Critical Education (University of British Columbia);
 IN Education (University of Regina);
 Alberta Journal of Education Research.-

news format to analyse, answering questions about the editorial angles presented, the level of criticality and the groups and individuals whose views are highlighted at the exclusion of others. As a class, each group would compare their findings. The role of the teacher would be to facilitate a productive discussion about student observations. “Are media outlets fundamentally focused on news or entertainment? What has been included in the broadcast and what has been omitted? Students can also be asked to reflect on why so many media outlets cover similar stories and present them from the same (or very similar) angle.” (p.12). Part B of this activity would instruct students to analyse the advertisements they encounter when watching television at home, noting details about the concealed and overt messages of advertising and their parallel social and political impacts: What messages are conveyed by the commercial, and why? Who does most of the talking? What race, gender, age, etc. are the characters in the commercials? How many instances of violence does one observe? Students can then seek to explain the difference between implicit and explicit messages, what is being said and not said, how subliminal messages are presented, and what might be the effect? This report also suggests students “take action” in the real world by producing their own media. However brief and dated (television advertisements are less relevant now that streaming platforms have upended viewing habits), these activity descriptions appear to be the only concrete academic proposals for critical media classroom interventions in Canada in the past decade. Considering these are only mentioned in passing and lack detail, they will not be formally analysed.

Data Collection Phase 2: Provincial Curriculum Resources

Provincial and territorial education departments typically do not provide lesson plans or resources for teaching media literacy, but there are a few exceptions. Nova Scotia has a modest

repository of video resources that address basic classroom management technology (Google classroom, ebooks) and “cyber bullying”, but the production of these videos seems to have dropped off in 2015.¹⁰ Newfoundland also maintains an online hub of classroom resources that are referenced directly in ELA policy documents, but resources for “/Digital Citizenship” are provided by not-for-profit organisations *MediaSmarts*’ (Canada) and Common Sense Media (US).¹¹ Details about *MediaSmarts* resources will be explored in the next collection phase.

Ontario’s policy for media literacy is the most robust of all the provinces and territories—with specific learning outcomes for each grade level from K-12. Brief “teacher prompts” are attached to each outcome to serve as jumping off points for discussion, but no substantive activities are outlined or discussed in depth. For example, the Grade 8 Learning Outcome 1.1 Purpose and Audience states: “[the student should] explain how a variety of media texts address their intended purpose and audience (e.g., this stage production based on a popular novel uses music and lighting to enhance the original and appeal to its fans; this commercial for a sports car uses fast-paced editing and rock music to appeal to the target audience –young, single men and women.”

Learning Outcome Area	Learning Outcome	Teacher Prompts
1.1 Purpose and Audience	explain how a variety of media texts address their intended purpose and audience (e.g., this stage production based on a popular novel uses music and lighting to enhance the original and appeal to its fans; this commercial for a sports car uses fast-paced editing and rock music to appeal to the target audience –young, single men and women)	“Why might a producer think that yet another version of this well-known story would attract a wide audience?” “What kind of driver is this car advertisement designed to appeal to?”

¹⁰ See Nova Scotia Learning Resource and Technology Services: <https://dvl.ednet.ns.ca/browse>

¹¹ See “Teaching Digital Citizenship”

https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/files/k12_safeandcaring_procedure_5.pdf

1.2 Interpreting Messages	<p>interpret increasingly complex or difficult media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations (e.g., compare the coverage of a lead story in a morning newspaper to the coverage of that story on the evening news; compare the order in which news stories are reported on two different television channels and suggest reasons for the differences; compare the treatment of a historical figure in a movie to his or her treatment in a print biography).</p>	<p>Did the newspaper and the television news program use the same lead story? Why or why not? Did the different news sources provide different information on the same topic? Did they take a different position? “Which historical portrait is more convincing? More accurate? More interesting? Why?”</p>
1.3 Evaluating Texts	<p>evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation and treatment of ideas, information, themes, opinions, issues, and/or experiences in media texts (e.g., explain how a series of newspaper stories on a controversial issue captured and maintained their interest; explain the similarities and differences in the treatment of a particular topic or theme in different media texts and evaluate the relative effectiveness of the treatments; as a class, evaluate the media’s coverage of a social or environmental issue over a two-week period)</p>	<p>No Prompt</p>
1.4 Audience Responses	<p>explain why different audiences (e.g., with respect to gender, age, culture, race, income level) might have different responses to a variety of media texts (e.g., predict how a member of a particular age/gender/ethnocultural/socio-economic group might react to a controversial article in a print or online news magazine and give reasons for their prediction)</p>	<p>“Do you think all members of a particular group would react the same way to this issue? Could an older person react the same way as a teenager? Why, or why not?”</p>
1.5 Point of View	<p>demonstrate understanding that different media texts reflect different points of view and that some texts reflect multiple points of view (e.g., a television broadcast of a sports game presents the views of fans, the announcers, the sponsors, and the television network; different media texts represent people of different age, gender, income level, or ethnocultural background differently, communicating obvious or subtle messages that might indicate bias or stereotyping; different points of view are often presented in a news report of a conflict)</p>	<p>“What different groups are represented in the text? Are the different groups treated differently? If so, how?” “In this news report about a conflict between two countries, does the reporter appear to favour one side over the other? Give evidence for your view.”</p>

1.6 Production Perspectives	identify who produces various media texts and determine the commercial, ideological, political, cultural, and/or artistic interests or perspectives that the texts may involve (e.g., a music company's interest in a recording may be different from that of the artist; the company that produces a video game and the game's creator may have different views on how the game should be promoted)	"How are commercial and artistic interests reflected in the contents and presentation of this CD by your favourite group?" "Explain how a more ideological approach might affect the appeal of this magazine for its current broad range of readers."
2.1 Form	explain how individual elements of various media forms combine to create, reinforce, and/or enhance meaning (e.g., print advertisements use text, images, colour, different fonts, and different camera angles in a seamless combination to create an effect)	"Why do you think each of these elements is included? How are the elements combined to create a coherent message?"
2.2 Conventions and Techniques	identify the conventions and techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they help convey meaning and influence or engage the audience (e.g., website conventions: home pages provide users with a convenient preview of the types of information available; website techniques: "sidebars" with inviting audio/video elements entice viewers to browse and explore new topics that might not have been their first priority)	No Prompt
3.1 Purpose and Audience-	explain why they have chosen the topic for a media text they plan to create (e.g., a poster advertising a class fund-raising campaign to appeal to local parent groups, businesses, or service organizations), and identify challenges they may face in engaging and/or influencing their intended audience	"What are the challenges involved in reaching each of these groups? How can you appeal to all of the groups in a single poster? If you were to develop three posters, one for each of them, how would the posters differ?"
3.2 Form	identify an appropriate form to suit the purpose and audience for a media text they plan to create (e.g., a multimedia presentation about their class or grade, to be presented to parents during graduation ceremonies) and explain why it is an appropriate choice	"What different types of media could you use for the presentation? How would they be organized and combined?"
3.3 Conventions and Techniques	identify conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create, and explain how they will use the conventions and techniques to help communicate their message (e.g., conventions in advertisements for a product to appeal to different age groups among the students: text, images, "free offer" promotional gimmicks; techniques: use of age-	"What are the important things you need to know about your audience when designing your media text?"

	appropriate content in all elements of the advertisement)	
3.4 Producing Media Texts	<p>produce a variety of media texts of some technical complexity for specific purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques (e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a multimedia presentation examining two or more elements of a narrative, such as theme, plot, setting, or character • a one-minute video advertising a class fund-raising project • a website based on the content of a unit of study • a report on school sports events to be presented during morning announcements magazine advertisements for a particular product, aimed at different age groups among the students in the school • an interview with a family member about his or her cultural heritage for publication in a school or community magazine/newspaper • a public-service announcement on a current issue that is relevant to their fellow students, such as daily physical activity, literacy, or bullying • a storyboard for a video of a favourite song that is not available as a video) 	No Prompt
4.1 Metacognition	identify what strategies they found most helpful in making sense of and creating media texts, and explain how these and other strategies can help them improve as media viewers/listeners/producers	Why was it helpful to think about your audience's needs or wants before creating your advertisement?"
4.2 Interconnected Skills	explain how their skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing help them to make sense of and produce media texts	"How could reading about food and health help you when you are trying to create an advertisement for a 'healthy eating' ad campaign?"
Source: Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) <i>The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8</i>		

Data Collection Phase 3: Online 3rd-Party Content

With no suitable reported interventions in the academic literature or provincial curriculum resources, the last data collection phase looks at third-party resources that are designed for secondary students. First, scanning the websites of professional teaching

organisations for any recent media or digital literacy-focused resources finds that of the 19¹² active teacher federations, just eight list resources of some kind: Alberta Teachers' Association; British Columbia Teachers' Federation; Canadian Teachers' Federation; Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association; Nunavut Teachers' Association; Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation; Ontario Teachers' Federation; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Apart from the OTF, all organisations only provide links to externally produced content. The OTF has 12 webinar videos for various digital literacy topics between 2013-2018 but does not provide any resources to conduct or support classroom interventions. However, the common thread amongst all organisations is the promotion of *MediaSmarts*— in some cases it is the only media literacy resource listed (NTA).

¹² Alberta Teachers' Association <http://library.teachers.ab.ca>
 Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens <https://www.aefo.on.ca/fr/>
 Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick <https://www.aefnb.ca/>
 Association Québécoise de professeur(e)s de français <https://aqpf.qc.ca/>
 Association québécoise des enseignantes et des enseignants du primaire <https://aqep.org/>
 British Columbia Teachers' Federation <https://www.bctf.ca/classroom-resources>
 Canadian Teachers' Federation <https://www.ctf-fce.ca/categories/educational-resources/>
 Manitoba Teachers' Society <https://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/>
 New Brunswick Teachers' Association <https://www.nbta.ca/>
 New Brunswick Teachers' Federation <https://nbtffeb.ca/>
 Newfoundland & Labrador Teachers' Association <https://www.nlta.nl.ca/links/>
 Northwest Territories Teachers' Association <https://nwtta.nt.ca/>
 Nunavut Teachers' Association <https://ntanu.ca/what-we-do/teaching-resources/>
 Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation <https://www.otffeo.on.ca/en/resources/useful-links/media-literacy/>
 Ontario Teachers' Federation <https://www.osstf.on.ca/resource-centre>
 PEI Teachers' Federation <https://www.peitf.com/>
 Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers <https://qpat-apeq.qc.ca/>
 Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation <https://www.stf.sk.ca/>
 Yukon Teachers' Association <https://www.yta.yk.ca/>

Organisation	Listed Resources (Canadian)
Alberta Teachers Association	• MediaSmarts
British Columbia Teachers' Federation	• INFORM: Identifying Quality Resources Tool
Canadian Teachers' Federation	• MediaSmarts
Newfoundland+Labrador Teachers' Association	• MediaSmarts
Nunavut Teachers' Association	• MediaSmarts
Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation	• National Film Board of Canada (access to lessons requires paid account)
Ontario Teachers' Federation	• Association for Media Literacy • CIVIX/CTRL-F • MediaSmarts
Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation	• MediaSmarts • National Film Board of Canada

The second data collection area for phase three looks at any Canadian media education groups that have produced digital media literacy classroom resources in the past five years. *MediaSmarts*, *CIVIX* and the *Association for Media Literacy* are the only groups actively operating. The future of the *Canadian Education Association*, which has operated in one form or another for over 130 years, remains uncertain as of 2023.¹³ The AML acts as a hub of external resources, including *MediaSmarts* and *CTRL-F*, but the vast majority are US-based (*C-SPAN*, *New York Times*, *Public Broadcasting Corporation*, etc.). Their website highlights *Media Literacy Essential Frameworks*,¹⁴ which includes the original 1989 Key Concepts, along with 26 deconstruction questions for analysing dimensions of text, audience, and production. The

¹³ See EdCan Press Release June 29, 2023: <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/urgent-message-to-our-valued-network/>

¹⁴ See <https://aml.ca/resources/essential-framework/>

framework of questions are excellent entry points for critical inquiry but fall short of modelling strategies to pursue meaningful answers.

TEXT	AUDIENCE	PRODUCTION
1. What kind of text is this? (e.g., tweet, magazine, video, T-shirt, poster, website)	1. Who is the target audience for this text?	1. Who produced this text?
2. Does it follow a formula or pattern?	2. How and why does this text appeal to its target audience?	2. For what purpose(s) was it produced?
3. What are the codes and conventions used?	3. How does this text (not) appeal to me?	3. How might knowing the producer and purpose change the meaning?
4. Are there any stereotypes?	4. How might this text include some people while excluding other people?	4. How might I influence the production of this kind of text?
5. What might be its (implicit and explicit) messages?	5. In what different ways might people use or consume this text?	5. How is this text distributed or sold to the public?
6. What values are being promoted?	6. How might I change the text to make it more effective?	6. Who owns the text (copyright)?
7. Whose point of view do the values represent?	7. How might I change the text to make it attractive to a different target audience?	7. Who profits from the consumption of this text?
8. Are my values represented?	8. How might this text be changing society?	8. What rules and laws affect the production of the text (e.g. copyright, running time, trademarks)?
9. Why or why not?		9. How might I create a similar text (or be prevented from doing so)?

Source: Association for Media Literacy (AML)

MediaSmarts receives on average \$1M in federal funding each year and has a large database¹⁵ of lesson plans and resources for all grade levels. For over two decades it has been the

¹⁵ <https://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/find-lesson>

most consistent source for media literacy curriculum support and currently houses over 110 lesson plans for grades 9-12 on a wide range of subjects. With a few exceptions, each lesson runs between 20 minutes and two hours, and are isolated activities that do not follow a sequential program. They are largely discussion-based, meant to introduce topics, and provoke further learning. A handful of lessons address “authenticating information”—*Brake The Fake*¹⁶ identifies “Four ways to tell if something is true online”:

1. Use fact-checking tools: See if a fact-checker like Snopes.com has debunked the story.
2. Find the source: Click on the link in a social media post to take you to the original story, so you can see if it comes from a trusted source.
3. Verify the source: Check Google or Wikipedia to see if the source is real and whether they have a good track record.
4. Check other sources: Do a search to see if other news outlets are reporting the same story.

Brief 45-second videos accompany the four “ways to tell” but none of these strategies are explained in any depth. The language choices throughout the lesson plan imply a general scenario where a student sees a headline in a social media post and “verifies” the content by clicking the external link and judging if the source is “trustworthy” or “real.”¹⁷

For sources of general information, like newspapers, find out if they have a *process* for making sure they’re giving you good information, and a good *track record* of doing it.

For more specialised sources, find out whether they’re *experts* or *authorities* on that topic. Do a search and make sure that they are an authority in the right field.

¹⁶ <https://mediasmarts.ca/break-fake>

¹⁷ <https://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/break-fake-how-tell-whats-true-online>

Asking critical questions is an important first step towards deep media literacy, but more structured guidance is required to channel any inquiry towards independent, analytical thinking. The overall message of this lesson is that one should not make critical judgments about the information they read online, but instead should consult sources that have already done the verification and analysis (i.e. *Snopes*, Wikipedia, journalists). *MediaSmarts* offers a more extensive catalogue of lesson plans and classroom interventions, but *CTRL-F* (a program run by *CIVIX*) is the only multi-lesson resource for Digital Literacy in Canada— four lessons with a classroom runtime of 7 hours. Although it is relatively new (created in May 2020 and periodically updated), it now receives comparable federal funding to *MediaSmarts*. Exact figures are not available (*CIVIX* did not respond to requests for information), however the *CTRL-F* lesson videos have received over 21K views on YouTube as of June 2023, which suggests a sizable impact. Due to its apparent scope and relatively recent production date, the analysis that follows will use the set of *CTRL-F* Digital Literacy lesson plans as a representative sample of current classroom resources.

Content Analysis Techniques

An apparent lack of digital and media literacy assessment data in Canada, coupled with the discursive nature of hidden curricula require a multi-pronged qualitative analytical approach for inquiry. Identifying the contours of hidden curricula and situating them within the current socio-cultural context requires an overall thematic and discursive analysis.

In his 1997 book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall does an excellent reading of Foucault— defining discourse as a group of statements which provide a way of talking about and representing knowledge (p.44). Both Foucault and Hall see discourse

as the production of knowledge through language— a system of interconnected representations. Language materialises conceptual frameworks, value systems and attitudes circulating in a society. This material connection through language is how both Hall and Foucault connect discourse to ideology. Neither Foucault or Hall are attempting to argue against knowable truth or reality—, they are simply pointing out that anything we deem to be knowledge or “truth” is more accurately described as “representation” (Hall, 1997, p.15). Hall identifies how representations become objects with material dimensions, but also highlights representation as a practice. This practice is constantly in flux; not only done by individuals and groups, but within institutional structures; it is an historical and temporal activity that involves certain kinds of competencies, expertise, and lack thereof. How is it enacted? For whom, and by whom? The relationship between knowledge and power may not be linear but is inherently symbiotic. Science, governance, religion/politics, and culture all carry distinct histories and relations to power that co-exist and sometimes vie for dominance (Weir, 2008).

Within the parameters elaborated below, I will identify repetitive patterns or salient recurring characteristics informed by my own theoretical understanding of the topic which will allow for new and unexpected findings to emerge. As modelled by Cambre and Lavrence (2018), I will approach the analysis in three phases: discursive content, categorical and critical code.

Investigating the hidden curricula requires Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) techniques. Analysing the relationship between language, ideology and identity brings forth the unseen agendas within discourse which are “generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity” (Fairclough, 1989, pg.97). As modelled by Morton (2016), the content analysis will explore three tiers: description (word choice, use of metaphors, and other language choices); interpretation (how the discourse is

presented and consumed by an audience); and explanation (how the particular text functions within socio-cultural practices). The discourse analysis conducted in phase one will inform the categorical analysis of phase two. What themes are revealed by examining the repetition of elements within the curricula? What binary logics are established? What value judgements are presented as common sense? The disciplinary control of the hidden curriculum funnels the conversation toward certain meanings and by analysing the discursive mechanics at work, the affordances and limitations being set up across the material become clear. In other words, how does the structure of the curriculum permit discussion of some topics while preventing others? Guided by these questions, the final phase of analysis zooms out to map the meta level movements of the hidden curricula at work and brings into view the effects of the micro level, making visible a certain kind of infrastructure that is woven together by discourses.

Chapter V - Discussion

The Discussion begins by outlining the content of the *CTRL-F* program. When logging into the site for the first time instructors are prompted to download the 40-page master document *CTRL-F Teaching Resources*– which outlines 4 lesson plans, activity sheets and a two-page glossary of terms. These lesson plans are step-by-step instructions that dictate the intended sequence of activities (24 total) in conjunction with external media– 47 digital slides and 13 videos that are intended to be reviewed as a class). Individual activity sheets and lesson plans are also made available via Google Drive, including a Pre-Test, Post-Test and optional extension activity. Answer keys for 12 of the 24 activities are also provided. Each lesson plan lists a brief overview, guiding questions, key terms and expected learning outcomes for student competencies (see Table 5). Per *CTRL-F*, the estimated runtime for all lessons and activities is between 6.5 and 8.75 hours.

The introduction block of text in the *CTRL-F Teaching Resources* document, (which is enlarged and highlighted in blue) reads: “With the rapid rise of false and misleading information online, the ability to tell what is reliable or trustworthy has become an essential skill of citizenship” (p.3). It goes on to say “CTRL-F: Find the Facts is designed to equip students with simple but powerful lateral reading skills purpose-built for the modern web.” These statements more or less establish the driving force of the lessons that follow evaluating the reliability or trustworthiness of information sources online.

Lesson	Guiding Questions	Key Terms	Learning Outcomes
1- Why Verify?	1: Why is it challenging to identify trustworthy information online? 2: What causes false and misleading information to spread? 3: How does lateral reading differ from vertical reading?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conspiracy theories • disinformation • hoaxes • information pollution • lateral reading • misinformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the problem of information pollution and distinguish between misinformation and disinformation • analyze how false and misleading information spreads online • explain the concept of lateral reading.
2- Investigate the Source	1. Who made this and why? 2. Which types of sources are more reliable? 3. How should I evaluate the reputation of a source?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advocacy • agenda • business • domain knowledge • expertise • lobby group • news organisation • reference source • social movement • think tank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain common motives for producing content • describe different sources of information and the motives behind their content • demonstrate lateral reading skills to evaluate sources • analyze why it is important to evaluate sources
3- Check the Claim	1. How do I distinguish between a factual claim and a value claim? 2. How do I verify a claim or story? 3. Which sources can I rely on to verify claims?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fact • factual claim • opinion • value claim • verify 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain the difference between a factual claim and a value claim • analyze when it is helpful to check claims • demonstrate lateral reading skills to verify claims
4- Trace the Information	1. Why is it important to trace information back to its original source? 2. Which skills can we use to find the original context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • altered • context • distorted • false context • reconfigured • reporting-on-reporting • reverse image search 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain different ways in which information gets altered or distorted online; • describe different skills for tracing information back to the original source; • demonstrate tracing skills to verify information.

No strategies are modelled or described in depth in Lesson 1, but many rhetorical assertions are made about the content of the lessons. Video #2 *Introduction to CTRL-F* states that students will learn three key skills to “investigate information online, sort fact from fiction and

determine credibility.” These skills are listed in an accompanying slideshow under the umbrella of *lateral reading strategies*, scantily defined as “leaving the [web] page and examining other sources” (lesson 2, slide 13). The skills that are set up to be explored over the course of lessons 2, 3 and 4 (respectively) are: “Using Wikipedia to verify a source’s reputation”; “Checking that a claim is reported by multiple reliable sources”; and “Tracing information back to an original source” (lesson 2, slide 15).

To synthesise the teaching points of the *CTRL-F* curriculum, I created a detailed table of text that captures all video transcripts, lesson plans and slideshows in sequential order. This allowed me to move through the entirety of the curriculum and isolate the rhetorical claims from the actionable directives that are described, modelled and reinforced through repetition. In other words, to identify what methods the curriculum *claims* to be teaching and what students are instructed to do in practice.

Slideshow Emphasis: Lesson 1, 2 and 3 each have an accompanying slideshow and the function of the 47 slides is primarily to provide working definitions for key terms and to show examples. In all, 20 terms are defined in the slideshows (see Table 6).

Term	Definition provided
Information Pollution	Many kinds of low-quality, false and misleading information that circulate online
Misinformation	when people share something they think is true but isn't
Disinformation	is when people share false or misleading information on purpose. The goal is to influence and cause harm.
Hoax	A form of disinformation that intends to trick people into believing a false story or event

Conspiracy Theory	A belief that a secret, powerful group of people is causing major news events, manipulating politics and the economy, or hiding important information about the world.
Lateral Reading	“leaving the page,” examining other sources and analyzing what others have to say.
Vertical Reading	“staying on the page,” examining the content closely to determine if you think it’s reliable.
News Organisations	Exist to provide information about current affairs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print publications (newspapers, magazines) • Broadcast news (TV, radio) • Online media (websites, news blogs, news videos, live news streaming)
Reference Sources	Designed to help you find specific types of information quickly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encyclopedias • Dictionaries • Maps and atlases • Almanacs
Government	Provide public information, research and statistics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government departments • Government agencies • Government ministries
Academic Research Institutions	Produce independent research to inform or influence decisions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities • Academic journals • Think tanks
Private Groups/Individuals	Produce information to inform, sell or influence. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses • Professional associations • Non-profit organizations • Community groups • Lobby groups • Social movements/social advocacy groups
Advocacy	Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence public opinion and decisions within political, economic, and social institutions. It can include many activities that a person or organisation undertakes including media campaigns, public speaking and publishing research.
Lobby Groups	advocate by communicating with government officials with the goal of trying influence government decisions or legislation (e.g., Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers).
Think Tanks	is a type of group action intended to carry out or undo social change (e.g., Women’s March).
Community Groups/ Non-Profit Organisations	sometimes advocate for their causes (e.g., Greenpeace campaigns for climate change solutions).
Fact	is something that is known or proven to be true. (e.g., After graduating from a university program, the average student has to pay back more than \$25,000 in student loans).
Opinion	is a view or judgment formed about something, not necessarily based on facts or evidence (e.g., College and university should be free in Canada).
Factual Claim	can be proven, true or false, by verifiable information. Factual claims are not necessarily true, but they attempt to convince you that something is true. Examples: Smoking causes cancer (true claim) and The Earth is flat (false claim)

Value Claim	Value claims are based on judgments or opinions. They cannot be proven or disproven. They try to prove that something is good or bad, right or wrong, or the best option. Examples: Animal Crossing is the most relaxing game and Eating meat is unhealthy
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Activity Emphasis: Analysing all 24 of the *CTRL-F* interventions¹⁸ for content, the clear emphasis was put on using Wikipedia to determine the accuracy, reliability, and agenda of a source— which made up almost half of the activities (11). Activities 2.3(a), 2.3(b), 2.4 and 3.2 explicitly direct students to use Wikipedia to evaluate the reliability and agenda of given sources without doing any further research or analysis. This method is also implied and/or outlined in several of the accompanying Answer Key/Walkthrough documents. For example, Activity 2.5 *Practice Evaluating Expertise*, question #1 provides a link to an *Ars Technica* article about COVID 19 and the student is asked to determine if the expertise of the author (Beth Mole) is appropriate for the subject. Rather than encourage students to pursue a critical and holistic inquiry, *CTRL-F* expects a student to simply consult the Wikipedia page for the author or publication and take this information at face-value. As evidenced by the Walkthrough/Answer Key for this activity, consulting other sources (the *Ars Technica* website) is only suggested when Wikipedia has already deemed them “reliable”:

We can look at the byline to see that the author’s name is Beth Mole. We can start by seeing if Beth Mole has a Wikipedia page. It turns out that she doesn't have a personal entry, but the publication she writes for (*Ars Technica*) does, and it mentions her, so let's start there. From the Wikipedia entry, we learn that Beth Mole is a health reporter with a PhD in microbiology. She also used to write for *Science News* (a science magazine). If we wanted to learn more, we could also look at Beth Mole's biography on the *Ars*

¹⁸ See Table 7

Technica site. The Wikipedia entry for Ars Technica confirmed that it is a reliable source, so we can trust what it says about its reporters. This biography only confirms that she is extremely qualified to report on health issues. We can feel confident that she is sharing credible information.

(CNTL-F Activity 2.5 Practice Evaluating Expertise)

When a Wikipedia page does not exist for a particular topic, group or individual students are directed to “check other sources” to verify a claim. Although the language is open-ended, the activities limit the notion of *other sources* to well-known news and fact-checking organisations that have a Wikipedia page to back up their credibility: “If these sources are still unfamiliar, just search for them on Wikipedia. In this case, several results have Wikipedia entries saying they are professional news organisations.” (Activity 3.3a Walkthrough)

The only other skill that students are asked to demonstrate is using a reverse-image search engine to find the original context of an image and determine if it has been altered (Activity 4.4 Practice Searching Images). The Walkthrough/Answer Key for this activity demonstrates how to use Google search engine and TinEye for other instances of an image, and then guides students to rely on “trusted news sources” and “reliable fact-checking websites” to contain the image they are looking for. For example, question #2 of Activity 4.4 shows a tweet with an image of North America where the centre of the United States is depicted as a giant lake. The tweet claims that the map shows what the US will look like in 30 years due to climate change. The question asks students to respond: “Do you think this image is real, or has it been altered? What did you learn to help make your decision?” The Walkthrough/Answer Key

suggests choosing the first reliable source in the search results– a fact-checking website called *Snopes*.

When we reverse search the image, the second result is from Snopes, a known reliable fact-checking site. Clicking into the Snopes article we see that this map does not represent what is claimed. The image has been manipulated – it was created by someone who wanted to compare the size of the Mediterranean Sea with the US. Snopes has rated this post as "miscaptioned" because the description of what the photo shows is inaccurate.

One third of the activities (8) do not require students to demonstrate a skill other than rote memorization. Students are often directed to watch a given video or slideshow and respond to a very brief set of questions taken directly from their content. For example, Activity 3.2, question #3 asks: “Watch ‘Advanced Claim Check with Mike Caulfield’ to learn how to check claims online. (1) Describe the skill discussed in the video. (2) Why is this a helpful strategy? (3) What is the concluding message and how does it relate to you?”

Intervention Name	Description of Skill
Pre-Test	Use Wikipedia, News Orgs, Fact-Checkers to determine trustworthiness in 10 mins
1.1 Your Media Habits	Student Survey
1.2 Information Pollution	Rote- video and slides repetition
Exit Card	Student Survey
Verification Handbook	Rote- video and slides repetition
2.1 Understanding Sources and Motives	Indicate type of source and motive (rote category application)
2.2 Using Wikipedia	Rote- video repetition (how to use Wikipedia)
2.3 (a) Practice Investigating Sources	Use Wikipedia to determine reliability

2.3 (b) Advanced Source Investigation	Use Wikipedia to determine agenda
2.4 Consolidation	Use Wikipedia to determine reliability
2.5 Practice Evaluating Sources	Rote- video repetition; does the source have domain knowledge? Use Wikipedia to determine expertise
L3- Starter	2 Truths and a Lie
3.1 Factual Claim vs. Value Claim	Grammar- Factual or Value Claim?
3.2 Checking Claims	Rote- video repetition; Search keywords to find reputable sources, determine True/False/Complicated
3.3 (a) Practice Checking Claims	Use Wikipedia, News Orgs, Fact-Checkers to determine accuracy
3.3 (b) Advanced Claim Check	Use Wikipedia, News Orgs, Fact-Checkers to determine accuracy
3.4 Consolidation	Use Wikipedia, News Orgs, Fact-Checkers to determine accuracy
L4- Starter Activity Option A	Game: Reporting on Reporting
L4- Starter Activity Option B	Game: Broken Telephone
4.1 Tracing Information Fundamentals	Rote- video repetition
4.2 Trace the Information	Rote- video repetition
4.3 Practice Tracing Information	Use Wikipedia, News Orgs, Fact-Checkers to determine accuracy
4.4 Practice Searching the History of Images	Use Reverse-Image search, News orgs to determine real/altered/context
Post-Test	Use Wikipedia, News Orgs, Fact-Checkers to determine trustworthiness in 10 mins

Discursive Analysis

Analysing the language choices of the *CTRL-F* program began with creating a central spreadsheet that included the text of every lesson plan (4), activity sheet (19), answer key (12), slideshow (47 slides) and video transcript (13). This allowed me to easily identify keyword frequencies and compare their contexts. In total, the word count registered at just over 24,500. The most frequently used nouns in the *CTRL-F* program are “source” (which appears over 300 times); “information” (204) “news” (129); “claim” (123); and Wikipedia (110). The most

common adjectives used were “real” (68); “true” (55); “trustworthy” (54) “false” (53) and “fact” (48). The keyword frequency points to the binary nature of the language throughout the lessons. Information is often presented or defined as yes/no propositions: “Is this true or false?”; “How did you decide if this source is trustworthy or not?” (Pre-Test & Post-Test); “Do you think this image is real, or has it been altered?” (Activity 4.4). Claims are presented as being either *factual* or *value laden*. The introductory video (*CIVIX Explains Information Pollution*) is a discursive microcosm of the entire *CTRL-F* program. In just two minutes and 17 seconds, it sets up the key binaries of true/false and trustworthy/untrustworthy while positioning information on social media as mostly untrustworthy and centering professional news organisations as “credible sources.” In fact, there is a discursive blurring between *news* and *information* throughout the lesson content:

Much of the information that we see online is not original news. Information and images will appear in many places outside their original context, copied, written from somewhere else, commented on, and reconfigured. The result can be like a game of broken telephone where stories get distorted as they get passed along.

(*CTRL-F* video #10 *Trace the Information*)

As the title suggests, the video for Lesson 4: *Trace The Information* emphasises that students should find the original source before assessing credibility. But journalism can only be considered an “original source” in certain circumstances. It is often a re-telling or interpretation of second-hand information.

Categorical Analysis

It is important to separate the stated themes of the *CTRL-F* program from the content that is emphasised through repetition. What ideas are reiterated? What tasks are students consistently asked to demonstrate? *CTRL-F* provides 19 distinct activity sheets, a Pre-test, Post-test and describes 3 mini activities embedded in the lesson plans for a total of 24. Examining the tasks described in the exercises helps to separate the curriculum's rhetoric from its practical, measurable instruction.

Almost half (11) of the activities ask the student to perform variations of the same task: Use Wikipedia to determine the credibility of a source or keyword searches to find "trustworthy" sources that verify the accuracy of a claim. An equally high number of exercises (10) are simply asking students for rote memorization of what is said in the curriculum videos and lesson slides. Much of the content is rhetorical or vague. Apart from the Verification Handbook and Activity 3.4 where students are asked to "Verify claims of your own choosing", real-world examples are pre-determined by *CTRL-F*. Most activity sheets come with linear Answer Keys, which eliminates any nuance or complexity from the student's work. For example, Activity 2.1 provides a list of 10 organisations and asks the student to determine the "type of source" as well as the "motive behind the information they produce". By itself, this prompt could encourage deep lateral reading on the history of an organisation and analysis of the content they produce, but students are only given 20 minutes to complete the activity. They are given a link to the organisation's website with the expectation that they draw from the definitions provided in Slideshow 1 and 2 to label the sources accordingly. The Answer Key for this exercise oversimplifies the analysis by limiting the possibilities for each motive per organisation. For example, The Sierra Club is assigned the motive *to influence* while Environment and Climate

Change Canada *to inform*, but both motives could apply equally to each. The answer key does not elaborate on how the classifications were determined, it simply expects a rote application of terms and definitions provided in the first two slideshows.

The message that is tacitly reinforced throughout the lesson material is that fact-checking is “simple” and other people will always be there to do important fact-checking for you. This message appears in some form over 14 times across 13 lesson videos (See Appendix B for transcripts of all videos). “So here’s a pretty convenient thing about fact-checking claims– no matter where the claim appears, the steps to check it are essentially the same” (*Skill: Advanced Claim Check* video #9). “I’m going to show you a quick trick that will help us figure out if a) the photo is real and b) if it’s showing what it claims to show” Often when images go viral, we can count on professional journalists and fact-checkers to do the work of establishing proper context for us” (*Skill: Search the History of an Image* video #13). “Fortunately, the original reporting, research, photo, or video are usually available on the web. There are also secondary sources that we can find that have done the hard work of verification for us” (*Trace the Information* video #10). When done properly, consulting other sources to triangulate information is time-consuming and methodical. It requires careful analysis through a critical lens. But *CTRL-F* actively encourages students to gloss over information and forgo content analysis: “Now we can read the whole story from top to bottom, but a faster way to check this is to search the page for keywords” (*Check the Claim* video #7). Having students perform Google-searches to find ready-made answers does not encourage or model critical thinking.

The lessons consistently refer to news organisations and journalists as *credible*, *trustworthy* and *reputable*, and frequently singles out individual outlets such as *CNN*, *BBC*, *CBC*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Vox*, etc. as reliable purveyors of information whose only goal is to *inform*:

The purpose of Vox, the agenda, is to explain news to readers, not to win elections, not to sell you medications, right? It was founded by reporters, not political consultants, scam artists or the propaganda arm of a foreign government. It's a news organisation and they are there to report the news. It's what they are set up to do" (*Evaluate Expertise* video #6). The lessons stop short of claiming that journalism should be blindly trusted as an information source, but they also do not discuss the commercial dimensions of news that heavily influence how it is produced.

Contemporary, mass-media journalism, which Hindman refers to as "mainstream" addresses readers and viewers in a particular way—cueing (or hailing) them to consume the content as neutral, transparent fact. This "rhetoric of objectivity" often uses stylistic devices to infer an empirical measurement of reality, particularly the use of numbers and statistics, to give an impression of "nothing-but-the-facts" (Roeh and Feldman, 1984, p.347). Objectivity as a professional principle (commonly referred to as *balance*) is rooted in empiricist philosophies of science) which sees objectivity as a binary: either you are objective or you are subjective (Wal-Jorgensen et al., 2017). This is a binary that continues to govern the standards and practices of journalism today. Op-Eds (opinion-editorials) are separated from 'hard news' stories and journalists are expected to be always neutral agents of observation. Hindman notes that this depersonalised mode of address was developed alongside the commercialization of the press. The need to sell more newspapers and more advertising space to turn a profit transformed journalism from a literary profession connected to the public interests of its readers, into a profit-driven business that tried not to alienate any specific segment of its audience. This point made by Hindman (1998) highlights one of the central dysfunctions of modern mainstream journalism: professional objectivity, reporting often becomes a vehicle for the uncritical repetition of publicity statements from private interest groups and powerful elites.

While these conventions allow individual reporters to construct individually balanced stories - those that tell more than one side of an issue - the bias within the structure of news defines what will be news and how it will be treated, and that news and its presentation reflect the concerns and views of those with power. (Hindman, 1998, p.178)

These formulas for balance and objectivity employed by mainstream journalism to maintain this false notion of objectivity can be described as “instrumental rationality” – when too much emphasis is placed on the method for acquiring knowledge to determine what is ‘true,’ enlightened thought goes from critical philosophy to one that maintains the status quo (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944/2002, pg.123). The same instrumental rationality is employed throughout the *CTRL-F* program. It repeatedly singles-out news organisations as the “best possible source” for information.

Reputable media sources have standards. They hire professional journalists. They correct mistakes and this commitment to accuracy matters and it's going to be there as long as they're a real ethical legitimate news source, regardless of whether the source is considered to be right-leaning or left-leaning.

(CTRL-F video #5 Skill Advanced Wikipedia Bias and Agenda)

The material presents value judgements by juxtaposing terms and examples more often than making direct claims. For example, students are instructed to question the credibility of a person or group that does not have a Wikipedia page (*Skill: Evaluate Expertise*, video #6, *Check the Claim*, video #7); that the opposite of news is “propaganda from a foreign government” (*Skill: Advanced Wikipedia Bias & Agenda*, video #5); and the idea that “group is causing major

events, manipulating politics and hiding important information” is the definition of a *conspiracy theory* (Lesson 1, Slide#12). Apart from the dozens of value assertions about the trustworthy nature of journalism, there are allusions to a neoliberal mindset that reveres authority and considers propaganda to be something that happens only in the context of nefarious state actors.

Critical Code Analysis

The prescriptive nature of the *CTRL-F* curriculum is both discursive and structural. Answer keys are given for most activities, and the illustrative examples used are often outdated and bare little-to-no relationship to students’ daily lives. Both students and teachers are trapped into a linear curriculum that relies entirely on a captive audience engaged in rote memorization. Topics are narrowly defined and limit what can be discussed as a result. The program explicitly excludes any discussion of bias, eliminating the potential for critical analysis of a source:

“People are really interested in bias and bias can matter. We could do a whole course just on bias. If you're looking at how media shapes reality on a larger scale, you're gonna have to deal with bias. But that's not what we're doing here.” (*Skill Advanced Wikipedia Bias and Agenda*, video #5). The program instead refers to the “agenda” of content, narrowly defining five possibilities– inform, sell, entertain, influence, and mislead– and myopically attaches them to generalised sources.

For example, the slideshow for Lesson 2 introduces the concept of identifying a motive for an information source. Students are then expected to “identify” the agenda for a string of examples. The first slide (Figure 1) shows a screenshot of an article in *The Globe and Mail* with the headline “Gender reveal party sparked California wildfire”. The screenshot itself is quite small. If a student were reading this from an overhead projector, only the headline would be

legible. A link to the article is not provided, but the first sentence of the article is legible once magnified: “A couple’s plan to reveal their baby’s gender went up not in blue or pink smoke but in flames when the device they used sparked a wildfire that burned thousands of acres and forced people to flee from a city east of Los Angeles.” The text on the slide prompts the students to answer the question: “Why was this article written?” and identify which of the 5 provided “motives” would apply in this context.

Why was this article written?



The screenshot shows a news article from The Globe and Mail. The headline is “‘Gender reveal party’ sparked California wildfire”. The author is Frank Baker, and the article was published 2 days ago. The main image shows a large wildfire with thick smoke rising from a landscape. Below the image, a caption reads: “A burned structure is seen at a wildfire in Yuba, Calif., Saturday, Sept. 5, 2020. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS”. The article text begins: “A couple’s plan to reveal their baby’s gender went up not in blue or pink smoke but in flames when the device they used sparked a wildfire that burned thousands of acres and forced people to flee from a city east of Los Angeles.” To the right of the article is a “TRENDING” section with five items:


- 1 ANALYSIS
Wednesday’s TSX breakout: An oversold stock anticipated to bounce back with a 44% return forecast
- 2 WE Charity closing Canadian operations, Kieburgers leaving organization
- 3 OPINION
Survival rates should not be the primary measure of Canada’s COVID-19 response
ROBYN URBACEK
- 4 Five tech sectors that will transform the economy and reward investors. Plus, the TSX bank stock that looks especially attractive right now
- 5 OPINION
If he loses support of the military, Trump is toast
LAWRENCE MARTIN

At the bottom left of the slide, there is a purple box with the text “CTRL+F” in white.

Figure 1: CTRL-F Lesson 2, Slide #4

The following slide (#4) provides an answer in bold “To inform. This story was written to explain the cause of the California wildfire”. It is implied that students should associate *news* with motivations to *inform*.

To inform



The story was written to explain the cause of the California wildfire.



Figure 2: CTRL-F Lesson 2, Slide #5

Assuming a news article was written “to inform” could be considered correct on a macro level, yet it glosses over the complicated nature of mainstream news sources which can be equally motivated to “inform” as they are to sell, influence, entertain and even mislead. The for-profit nature of news is not discussed in the slideshow, or the rest of the *CTRL-F* curriculum. This is a missed opportunity to add nuance and critical complexity to the subject. Students are not even expected to find the original article or read it through. A more critical analysis of this example would highlight multiple motives and analyse the ways in which they influence each other. Despite it containing facts and information, the wordplay that riffs on the topic gender reveal parties indicates that this is a “soft news” story with a clear entertainment angle. If the only goal of the story was to “inform”, why would a Canadian newspaper choose to write about

the cause of a fire in California? While it is true that national newspapers frequently cover stories of international importance (including wildfires)– but why report on this fire in particular? There are an average of 8000 forest fires in California every year (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 2022). There was nothing remarkable about this particular fire (size, duration, damage) apart from the unusual “spark”. The headline was written to feature the “gender reveal party” element of the story. A more factual headline would have simply said “Pyrotechnic device sparked California wildfire” or “Couple held responsible for sparking California wildfire at private gathering”. To state that this story was “written to explain about the cause of the California wildfire” with the goal “To inform” is only half correct. Factual and timely information is contained in the article, but the motivation for reporting it reflects a combination of agendas. This is true of any news organisation that relies on advertising revenue to sustain itself. Furthermore, due to the motivations of special interest groups and people in positions of power, news organisations are often complicit in spreading false or misleading information simply by putting publicity statements into the bloodstream of public knowledge. Understanding the complex commercial dimension of the news industry is a necessary precursor for critical analysis.

Although screenshots of headlines and social media posts are frequently used as illustrative examples, their hyperlinks are provided in the lesson plans or slideshows where they appear. Instruction exists somewhat in a vacuum, where the student’s experience can be controlled. In video#13 *Skill Search the History of the Image*, the examples demonstrate how to use reverse image search engines to “find the photo in its original context and understand the meaning.” In each example a photo is reverse searched using Google and then the “most credible” website that contains the image is selected for review. Conveniently, the most credible

sources are fact-checking site *Snopes*, and National Geographic which have already broken down how viral images have been manipulated or misused. Finding the original context of the image by oneself is not demonstrated.

Chapter VI - Triangulation of Findings

The triangulation of findings will present different elements of each type of analysis, highlighting whether they support or contradict each other. This, in turn, will enable me to present how my analyses help in answering this study's three research questions.

Research Question 1: What organisations provide digital media literacy curriculum in Canada?

The introductory video *CIVIX Explains Information Pollution* ends with the declaration: “Before believing or sharing something, stop and ask who made this, and why? This is the first step in combating information pollution to become a more informed citizen.” If this line of questioning is applied to the curriculum resources, a problematic picture begins to form. Although the AML provides a token resource, it does not receive the level of funding that *CIVIX* and *MediaSmarts* do from governmental or corporate donors. Given the strong links to large corporations, and monopolisation of federal funding initiatives, it is problematic that *MediaSmarts* is the go-to organisation amongst provincial education departments, teacher organisations¹⁹ and post-secondary education programs for classroom resources related to media and digital literacy. The legitimacy of *MediaSmarts*' mission is severely undercut by the fact that it frequently partners with corporations, including Microsoft and IBM, to stress “on-the-job training and upskilling” to meet future labour market demands (Hadziristic, 2017).

CIVIX is also problematically governed by a board of directors which includes former political consultant and current Public Policy Manager for Facebook (*Meta*) Canada, Rachel

¹⁹ (Canadian Teachers' Federation; British Columbia Teachers' Federation; Alberta Teachers' Association; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation; Ontario Teachers' Federation; Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association; Nunavut Teachers' Association)

Curran; CEO of a digital marketing company *The SchoolFinder Group*, Chris Wilkins; and Peter Donolo, Vice Chair of the public relations firm *Hill+Knowlton Strategies Canada*, which frequently works on behalf of federal political parties, government projects and the oil industry. Ironically, *Hill+Knowlton Strategies* has been called out by the *Union of Concerned Scientists* for having a “shameful record of spreading misinformation on behalf of oil companies” (Webster & Amin, 2022). It should be noted here that *CIVIX* is an organisation that primarily conducts mock elections for elementary and secondary students to encourage “democratic engagement.” They claim to have worked with 11,000 schools across Canada since 2004. An archived snapshot of their website lists an array of private financial supporters between 2011-2015 that include several philanthropy foundations, as well as hedge-fund managers, business owners and a former conservative senator. This detailed list is no longer on the *CIVIX* website but offers insight into the funding structure over the past decade. There is a clear alignment of interests with businesses and political organisations that promote democratic institutions, which is what led to the *CTRL-F* project. Launched in 2018, it began with just a few short videos presented by journalists from BuzzFeed and the CBC, as well as researcher Mike Caulfield from the University of Washington’s Centre for an Informed Public (CIP). Although various people are acknowledged in the *CTRL-F* lesson plan document as the “Resource Development Team”—Caulfield is the principal architect and presenter. His biography notes that he has worked with various organisations on “digital literacy initiatives to combat misinformation and disinformation” including *The American Democracy Project*, and the *Election Integrity Project* at Stanford University.²⁰ A closer look at his career reveals that Caulfield has worked with highly politicised organisations that are often funded by lobby groups and large corporations.

²⁰ <https://ischool.uw.edu/people/faculty/profile/mica42>

Caulfield is also a long-time collaborator of Sam Wineburg, co-founder of the *Stanford History Education Group* (SHEG) which produced a popular digital literacy resource known as *Civic Online Reasoning* (COR) in 2018 (Warzel, 2018; Wineburg et al., 2019). The structure and content of COR bears many similarities to *CTRL-F*: three main lessons with short videos and activities that use the same lateral reading strategies (Wikipedia and Google) to “see what other sources say.” There is also a similar blurring of lines between the concept of *news* and *facts*, which is elaborated upon further in the 2019 white paper that describes the COR project’s origins. The authors acknowledge that the COR strategies were developed by observing professional journalists: “To develop a roadmap, we observed fact checkers at the nation’s leading news outlets and distilled their strategies into an instructional approach we call Civic Online Reasoning (COR)—the ability to search for, evaluate, and verify social and political information” (Wineburg et al., 2019, p.4). The paper also invokes the 2016 US presidential election and Russian disinformation as a catalyst for the COR project. It repeatedly uses the example that “Fifty-two percent [of students] believed that a Facebook video allegedly showing ballot stuffing provided “strong evidence” of voter fraud during the 2016 Democratic primary elections. The video was actually shot in Russia—a fact easily established with a basic search” (p.5). Peeling back the layers of funding, the COR digital literacy program was funded almost entirely by *Google*— aka the “most powerful company in the world” (Jack, 2017) via *MediaWise*— a sub-project of the non-profit journalism school and think-tank *The Poynter Institute*.

Other major funders for *MediaWise* include tech giants *Meta* (formerly known as *Facebook*), *TikTok*, *Microsoft* as well as US government propaganda groups such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Officially, NED is a non-governmental organisation funded by congress “dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the

world.”²¹ However, many scholars and independent media outlets paint a more nefarious picture of NED. “The National Endowment for Democracy was established by Congress, in effect, to take over the CIA's covert propaganda efforts. But, unlike the CIA, the NED promotes US policy and interests openly” (ProPublica, 2010). The 2018 short documentary *Inside America's Meddling Machine* claims that NED has repeatedly interfered in elections, mobilised coups, and orchestrated public relations campaigns against nations that resist Washington's agenda.

The NED's first success was the defeat of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua's 1990 elections, replacing it with the neoliberal party of Violeta Chamorro. Since then, the NED's advanced US interests in countless countries: it helped swing a Russian election for Boris Yeltsin in 1996, it drove a failed coup attempt in Venezuela in 2002, it orchestrated a successful one in Haiti in 2004, and another one in Ukraine in 2014, which paved the way for neo-Nazis to move into the mainstream (Blumenthal, 2018)

While these financial partnerships do not necessarily guarantee premeditated ulterior motives, the concept of democracy has been weaponized by US governmental and non-governmental organisations to advance the interests of powerful elites and should be questioned. Such ideologically-driven organizations work to manufacture social and political consent for geopolitical pursuits, rather than cultivate healthy relationships to power.

Research Question 2: What strategies are modelled or prescribed?

The strategies modelled throughout the curriculum are best described as three general directives:

- Consult Wikipedia to get a summary of unfamiliar sources and their credentials.

²¹ See The National Endowment for Democracy: <https://www.ned.org/>

- Consult fact-checking organisations (Professional Journalism, *Snopes*, *Politifact*, AFP, factcheck.org)
- Google search keywords to see if multiple trustworthy news sources are reporting the same claims.

The use of lateral reading strategies is minimal, and content evaluation is intentionally set aside in favour of attributing source credibility in terms of institutional authority. Instead of showing how to evaluate factual claims with demonstrable methods, there is a *discursive showing* that presents shallow definitions and disembodied information without attribution or context. At best, it is a missed opportunity to model genuine fact-checking— a baffling choice, considering that one of the two experts featured in this curriculum is a journalist. At worst, it models the diametrically opposite behaviour of fact-checking and encourages students to accept claims that are simply *presented* to you as a fact by the right people. When attempting to differentiate between “factual claims” and “value claims”, *CTRL-F* presents examples without any context, nuance, or referential sources. “Smoking causes cancer” is “factual”, and “The Earth is flat” is “false”. But no insight is offered into how one goes about analysing or corroborating these claims in the absence of an “authoritative” source.

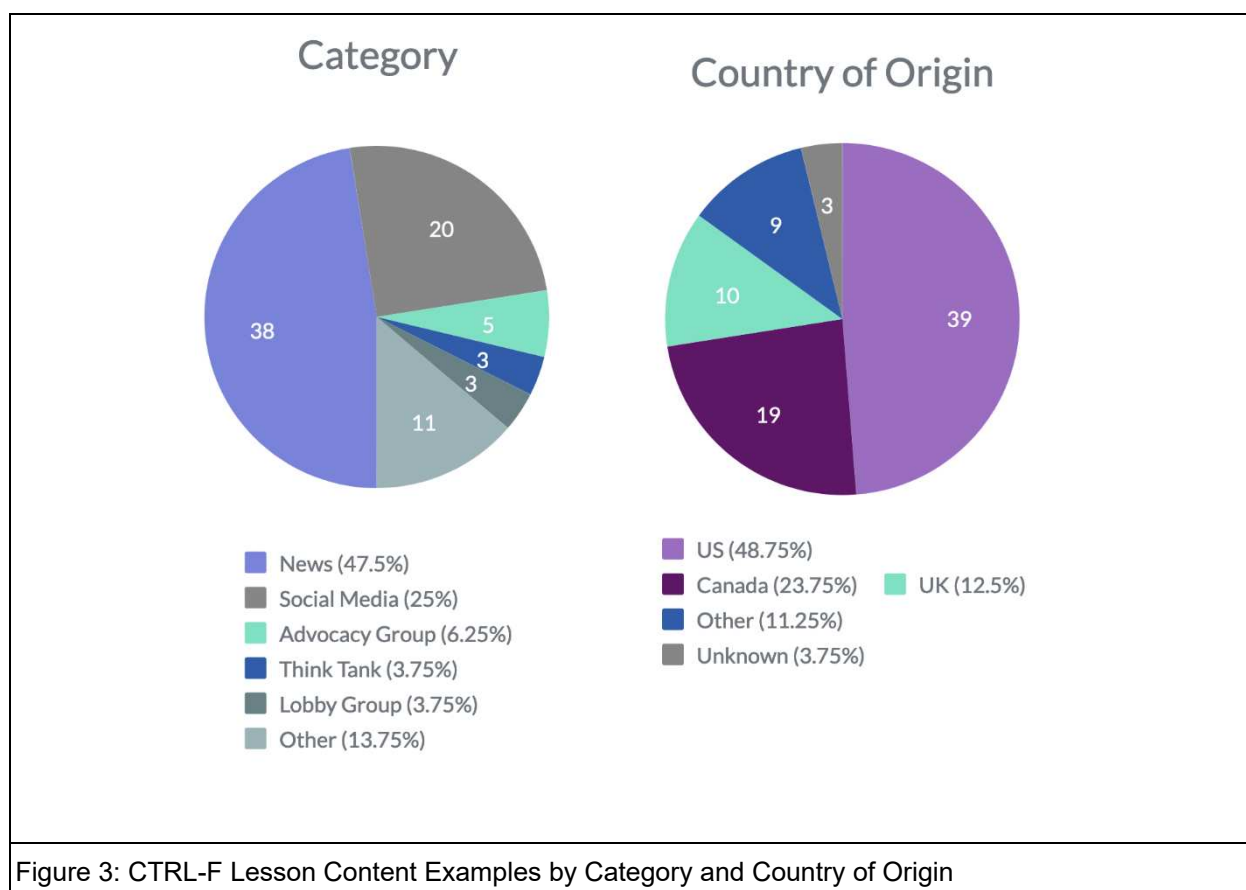
Research Question 3: Do the interventions or heuristics reinforce binary notions of “credibility” and “fact” which constitute a Foucauldian “regime of truth”?

Throughout the *CTRL-F* lessons information is framed through as a binary concept of true/false or credible/not credible. i.e., “Do you think this image is real, or has it been altered?” (Activity 4.4); “In this survey, you will be asked to decide if information you see online is trustworthy” (Post-Test); “We need to figure out where information is coming from and whether

it is real or truthful” (Lesson 1, Slide #7); “Now that’s a pretty provocative statement, but is it true?” (*Skill: Check Other Sources*, video#8); “The skills introduced in this section are all about tracing information back to the original source. That way we can get closer to the truth with a story that’s more complete and more accurate” (Lesson Plan 4, Starter Activity). Use of the words “truth” and “reliable” were most often attributed to news organisations and were presented always in binaries (unreliable, false). Teaching younger students the nuances of what constitutes truth, fact and knowledge is challenging but cultivating an understanding that things are not as binary as true/false or reliable/unreliable is a crucial first step to critical thinking. Unfortunately, the lessons address students as an authoritative source without citing a single claim, image or example throughout the entire program. By praising Wikipedia and *Snopes* for providing references when it fails to do so at any point in the lesson.

Do the interventions embody characteristics of Critical Intermedia Pedagogy? As was discussed in an earlier section, the criteria for critical intermedia pedagogy is not definitive or exact, but a philosophical approach that focuses on lived experience (autobiographical connection to students), in-depth lateral reading strategies and examining the dynamics of representation, power and ideology through the engagement of multiple texts and mediums. Unfortunately, the *CTRL-F* program fails to meet any of the critical intermedia pedagogy criteria. It presents a damaging neoliberal curriculum from a discursive perspective while also employing poor pedagogical design. The one-size-fits-all approach creates a very narrow frame for reality to be explored and sets itself up to have no meaningful autobiographical connection to students. Apart from activities 2.4 and 3.4 where students are prompted to “Verify claims of your own choosing”, the real-world examples in the *CTRL-F* program are predetermined and mostly disembodied from their original contexts (e.g., a screenshot of a tweet as opposed to a link). To

synthesise the nature of these interventions, I made note of every ‘real-world’ example used across the lesson material, including the category (news story, social media post, etc.) and the country of origin (where possible) for a total of 81 distinct examples (approximately 20 per lesson).²² While it may be possible (in theory) for a curriculum to preselect illustrative examples that mirror students’ real-life experiences, the *CTRL-F* program appears to be dominated by examples that are US-based (48.7%) and related to mainstream news (47.5%), as Figure 3 shows below. Canada-based examples and content account for less than a quarter of the material (23.7%).



²² See Figure 3

The most recent longitudinal data suggests that students are not engaging much with news in their spare time. Only 13-15% of Canadian students in grades 7-11 share links to news stories on a regular basis (depending on gender). 60-64% do so less than once a year or not at all (Steeves, 2014a). They are engaging with social media– the most common daily online activity for students in grades 4-11 involves posting to a social network or reading posts of others (30%). Watching videos on streaming sites such as Youtube ranks the second most common at 24%. And yet, social media-related examples only account for 25% of the *CTRL-F* material. This suggests the emphasis on US news in the *CTRL-F* curriculum does not resonate to the daily interests and realities of young Canadian students.

Although the *CTRL-F* program engages multiple texts and mediums as illustrative examples, the analysis that is modelled does not put multiple texts in conversation with each other in a way that allows for contextual processing. Students are simply led to assume that a claim is true if more than one reputable source has come to the same conclusion: “If it's a true story, there should be multiple other sources reporting it. If it's a false story, it's very likely that a reputable organisation has already fact checked that claim for you” (*Check Other Sources*, video #8). Assuming that an organisation has already fact-checked a claim for you is not a strategy, but a rote transmission. It positions journalists and online fact-checking organisations as proxies for doing the actual work of critical thinking, while promoting a neoliberal accounting formula to determine the veracity of a claim. This privileges a credibility hierarchy over the application of analytical thinking to the claim itself. In fact, content analysis is explicitly set aside and framed as a separate issue altogether.

The stated learning outcomes for Lessons 1 to 4 fall under the umbrella of “lateral reading” but the strategies modelled lack meaningful depth. Students are given a fragmented

sentence to define lateral reading: “leaving the page, examining other sources and analysing what others have to say”; and three “examples” that form the basis of the lessons that follow: (1) Using Wikipedia to learn about the reputation of a source (2) Checking to see if a story or claim has been reported by multiple reliable sources and (3) Using the web to trace information, quotes, or images back to the original source ((Lesson 1, slide #13-15). Comparing the lateral reading strategies outlined in *CTRL-F* to the Forzani framework (previously examined in the literature review), *CTRL-F* fails to offer information analysis from multiple tiers– content, context, and source. The scope is limited to the credibility, expertise, and agenda of the source in question. Rhetorical claims made throughout the curriculum about exploring the reputation of a source are not supported by strategies that go beyond repeating what Wikipedia has said or using reverse-image searching. The *CTRL-F* program ultimately takes the same protective pedagogical stance of 1990s media literacy, attempting to “inoculate” students from the internet, rather than cultivate a critical relationship to it. Even in passing, the internet is referenced as something that is “full of nonsense” (*Introduction to CTRL-F*, video #2) and “wrong information” (*CIVIX Explains Information Pollution*, video #1). It also makes some very questionable claims about how people consumed information in the past: “Historically people didn't have to worry so much about the reputation of the media that they relied on. Those sources were limited, and content was coming directly from an authoritative source. But online there are so many different groups publishing and sharing information through different channels and all the different motives”

(*CTRL-F* video #3 *Investigate The Source with Jane Lytvenenko*).

Attempting to create a curriculum that caters to such a wide age-range results in content that is both over-simplified and opaque. Activities often talk-down to students– providing step-

by-step instructions for searching keywords with Google (*Click Through and Find*, video #11; *Check The Claim*, video #7). Activity 3.1 directs students to analyse claims by sentence-structure alone— which is perhaps a relevant competency for elementary students, but not an appropriate critical-thinking activity for the secondary level. The most egregious example is the Starter Activity for Lesson 4 where a game of *Broken Telephone* to illustrate information becoming distorted as it travels between news organisations. This involves a circle of students whispering the phrase: “A dog named Goose ran loose through the spruce forest chasing a moose” from one person to the next with the assumption that the phrase will become something different once it reaches the last student (*CTRL-F*, 2020, p.30). It is difficult to imagine teenagers meaningfully engaging with these schoolyard games or using them to make critical observations about news media. Many of the activities infantilize critical topics and reduce complex issues about the agendas of political think tanks and lobby groups to fragment sentences in a slideshow.

Although a common message in this curriculum is to “check other sources” to verify information online, it does not engage multiple texts in an intermedial manner and limits concepts of truth and trustworthiness to ideological thinking. Critical intermedia pedagogy focuses on measuring the hegemonic with and against the subaltern, which means doing away with the notion of ideal source and comparing competing texts and perspectives holistically. Herein lies the biggest pedagogical roadblock to the *CTRL-F* program. The scope of discussion seeks to prevent any discussion of dissent, negativity, or the possibility of subjugation.

Chapter VII – Proposed Alternatives

What must be done in the face of neoliberal curricula that promotes ideological thinking and superficial navigation of content? Given the challenges outlined in previous sections, it is worthwhile to discuss accessible and effective strategies for teachers to bring a critical intermedia approach to their classrooms. How might we start a political and methodological commitment to a truly critical intermedia pedagogy? Here I offer my own suggestions and approach as an intermedia workshop facilitator, with acknowledgement of the thinkers and methods that have influenced my practice.

First, there are philosophical preconditions that must be met by instructors. They must be willing to take up their role as activists and position themselves as co-learners with students. This requires a commitment to discussing uncomfortable topics, challenging long-held assumptions, and embracing the pedagogical potential of media that students engage with in their day-to-day lives. Interventions like *CTRL-F* standardise instruction material, which fails to model inquiry and removes all pedagogical agency from the instructors and students. These approaches shy away from specificity and deep analysis and attempt to shoehorn inquiry into binary yes/no questions. Rather than design a set of lessons with pre-determined media texts and hand-picked examples, critical inquiry centres the media that students engage with at home– which varies from student-to-student, classroom-to-classroom. Luckily, the nature of digital media has endless possibilities for meaningful learning.

In 1989, media philosopher Vilem Flusser described computer images as “disembodied surfaces” that disrupt the traditional communication function of sender-addressee. “Among other things, an image is a message. It has a sender and it searches for an addressee...Recently something new has been discovered. Disembodied images, ‘pure’ surfaces, and all the images

that have so far been in existence can be translated (transcoded) into images of a new kind.” (Flusser, 2002/1989, p.70). Flusser predicted that these new images would become increasingly portable and addressees even more “immobile”, while many different participants would cooperate to project different meanings onto these disembodied surfaces (1989/2002, p.73). This prescient definition highlights how digital media have altered dynamics of authorship, production, and permanence, which is why I include his definition here. What separates digital images from traditional images (such as photographs, television, etc.) is their collective creation, circulation, and transformation (Milner, 2016). I would like to think that Flusser had internet memes in mind when he described the future of digital images.

An internet meme most often takes the form of an image, GIF or video that is the result of existing images or other elements coming together to create new visual iterations— circulating via mimicry and digital alteration (typically through social media). The term *meme* has become synonymous with internet inside jokes, or “digital folklore” which reflect cultural attitudes or niche sentiments and opinions (Shifman, 2014). But the term was originally coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe a “basic unit” of an idea that spreads from person to person within any given culture or cultures. A meme is the cultural equivalent of a gene in biology, replicating itself through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena. Digital memes transmit complex meanings through “units” that propagate through social-selective processes— that is, borrowing and re-mixing elements of other texts to create concise and humorous visual metaphors. Due to their intertextual creativity and popularity the pedagogical potential of memes is not limited to any singular demographic or subject. Rather than *transmit* information, they provide brief, creative engagements to a given topic or discourse, through an intuitive, visual shorthand that is fun to decode.

Memes are not *read* sequentially like text– they are visual puns that rely on pattern recognition to activate and decode meanings. Arthur Koestler (1975) uses the concept of spatial contiguity to describe how puns are strings of thought tied together by a purely “acoustic knot” performed through a “sudden bisociation of a mental event with two habitually incompatible matrices [that] results in an abrupt transfer of the train of thought from one associative context to another” (p.59). As Charles Garoian (2015) points out, this bisociation is made through the spatiality of two or more contiguous concepts within the same space of thought. In other words, it is the juxtaposition of elements that works semiotically to infer meaning through relations of spatiality, as opposed to transmissivity.

What exactly is *pedagogical* about memes? Although they are not formally instructional or didactic, they quickly present ideas in a humorous way that can be seized on for further inquiry. Media Studies scholar Elisabeth Ellsworth (1997) creatively combines the fields of education and media studies through the concept of *mode of address*. Critical film theory uses mode of address to analyze the dynamics of representation at play; Who is represented, and who is doing the representing? What assumptions does a text make about itself and about its audience? Ellsworth argues that the politics of representation and meaning making play out similarly in education in both hidden and overt ways (p.10). How the curriculum addresses a student has impacts the way they respond. When students are reading from a textbook or completing an assignment, they are being hailed to respond as institutional subjects. Organic modes of address on the other hand, appeal to the affective dimensions of knowledge and understanding. As semiotician Roland Barthes (1980/2010) explains, viewers are more receptive to meaning that is presented with some level of ambiguity– something that is too obviously meaningful is quickly deflected. Satire, for example, creates a distance between what is said and

what is meant by dialing reality up to absurd proportions to avoid falling into the realm of the “oppressively real” (Frye, 2000, p.224). Memes are sort of a visual satire that create succinct metaphors with images from public spaces, words, graphics, etc.— but their digital nature creates an interactive surface that can be entered and explored. Although digital spaces are not three-dimensional, the hyperlinked dimensions of their authorship and production transform the “research” process into a graphic interface. The disembodied digital surface positions viewers as designers of meaning, while the image itself becomes a carrier.

What does this look like in practice? The compact nature of internet memes makes them an excellent jumping off point for discussing dynamics of representation. Before introducing a simple framework of questions to guide deconstruction, I invite students to present a meme they find funny, or have recently shared with a friend and prompt them with the question *why is this funny?* When students reflect on their sense of humor it provokes interesting discussions about subjectivity and perspective. Not everyone will find a joke “funny” even if the intended meaning is clear. Who the joke is *for*? Who is responsible for making it? A viewer can deconstruct its meaning regardless of whether they find it funny. These are crucial first steps in having students locate themselves as “viewers” vis-à-vis representation, while exposing the dimensions of authorship and production at play. This segues into four key questions that apply to deconstructing all media texts: (1) What genre of media text is it? (2) Who (or what) made this? (3) What does it express? (4) What could be the motivation for producing it (Deveaux, 2022).

By inviting students to go beyond surface level answers, a lexicon of genre conventions begins to form. How do we recognize a meme? What cues us to differentiate it from similar media, like a funny photo? Can we separate the characteristics of advertisements, entertainment or information? What cues us to *read* a text a certain way? These questions extend to

authorship— who or what created the meme? How can we trace the authorship to understand how it was produced? How can the original context of where the meme was encountered offer clues about its meaning? What patterns or cues signal a point of view? Most importantly, what could be the motive(s) for producing it? Is there a deeper meaning or motive below the surface? Does anyone profit from it? What larger context can it be connected it to?

Once students become familiar with deconstructing memes that personally resonate with them, a second type of activity shifts their analysis to memes from an outside perspective. This approach borrows from Albert Marshall’s concept of “Two-Eyed Seeing” (*Etuaptmumk*). It is a metaphor for Indigenous and Western knowledges, or ways of *seeing*, which are mutually strengthened when both “eyes” work together (Hatcher, 2009). Two-Eyed Seeing encourages a relationship to knowledge that seeks out multiple perspectives in pursuit of a wider “field of vision” (p.146). Exploring perspectives from outside our immediate circles is a foundational critical habit, but it also brings topics into the classroom that the standard curricula ignore. It is important to emphasise to students that the goal of deconstructing representation is never to “agree” with a point of view or expect total clarity. Rather, it is to become familiar with the mechanics and of how a representation or idea is made manifest.

It is equally crucial that students be given the freedom to guide their own research process while also collaborating on strategies with their peers. Building their own web of understanding builds a muscle memory for analysis, while opening opportunities to reflect and pursue further exploration (Forzani, 2019). Students can choose an unfamiliar meme that catches their eye online, while instructors can take the opportunity to find memes that relate to topics or groups they would like to bring into the classroom. Using an example meme, (Figure 4), I will briefly illustrate how memes can be operationalized as visual pedagogy by describing a

classroom intervention I typically conduct during in intermedia workshops with secondary students.



Figure 4: *Reconciliation is Dead* meme posted by Twitter user @TheAgentNDN

Question #1: What is it? The example meme was made by Twitter user @TheAgentNDN— an Indigenous meme creator who posted this in reaction to railway blockades organised in solidarity with hereditary chiefs of the unceded Wet’suwet’en territory in northern British Columbia. The chiefs had been attempting to block construction of an oil pipeline which had not obtained the necessary consultation with the community yet were subjected to raids by the militarized arm of the royal Canadian Mounted Police (Brown and Bracken, 2020). Mainstream journalism provided daily coverage of the blockades, yet the nuances of the protest slogans using the term “reconciliation” and the broader discussion of colonialism were rarely addressed. Much of the media coverage was overwhelmingly focused on the economic impact and “illegality” of the “protesters” and did not engage the necessary history, context, or Indigenous perspectives that sparked the blockades (DiMatteo, 2020). Memes by Indigenous creators acted as counter-discourses to news reports in real time. The hyperlinked

and reactionary nature of memes makes them ideal platforms to discuss different points of view on current issues and events. Whereas official “curriculum” materials, books and other educational tools take time to develop, memes can engage topics that happen just hours, even minutes beforehand. Beyond “timeliness”, memes also create an entry point to an endlessly complex topic that does not necessarily have a “beginning”.

Question #2: Who (or what) made this? What can be gleaned from the context of the original post? Does the language used in the meme tell us something about the author? The term “Reconciliation” can be seized as an object for inquiry and/or debate. Is there more than one definition of this word? Does it’s meaning change depending on context? What current usages can we find?

2 who (or what) made it?

What can the original context of the post tell us about its production and the maker? What attracts people to the account? What seems to be the intention behind it?

1:33 AM Feb 23, 2020 Twitter for Android

57 Retweets 2 Comments 139 Likes

Exploring the engagements and profiles of the original post provide insight into the audience. Who does the meme resonate with?

Agent NDN
@TheAgentNDN 12K Following 16.8K Followers
Operative of the NDN Agency. Listuguj Mi'gmaw.
All opinions and views are psychological projections on your part.

the description and user handle with the phonetic pun "NDN" and sarcastic disclaimer about "views and opinions" point to the satirical nature of the account.

Agent NDN
@TheAgentNDN

their Twitter profile identifies them as Mi'gmaw from the Listiguj Nation

Figure 5: Breakdown of Twitter user profile to explore meme authorship

Question #3: What is being expressed? When dealing with memes, another way to ask this question is *why is this funny?* Two images come together to create this meme: The “Canadian Heritage Minutes” frame and a photograph of an inverted Canadian flag with the words “Reconciliation is Dead” in giant black letters. Before digging into the photo’s original context, these cursory signifiers provide enough information to glean the ‘joke’. The meme constructs its satire through opposition; the inverted flag; the conflicting terms “reconciliation” and “dead”; reversing notions of “pride” associated with heritage by highlighting a “negative”; The comparison to “heritage” implies a shared national responsibility, as well as an historical chain of events leading up to the photo in question, implying that “reconciliation is dead” has historical precedents. In other words, the consistency of colonial violence throughout history has rendered the rhetoric of reconciliation meaningless, or “dead”.

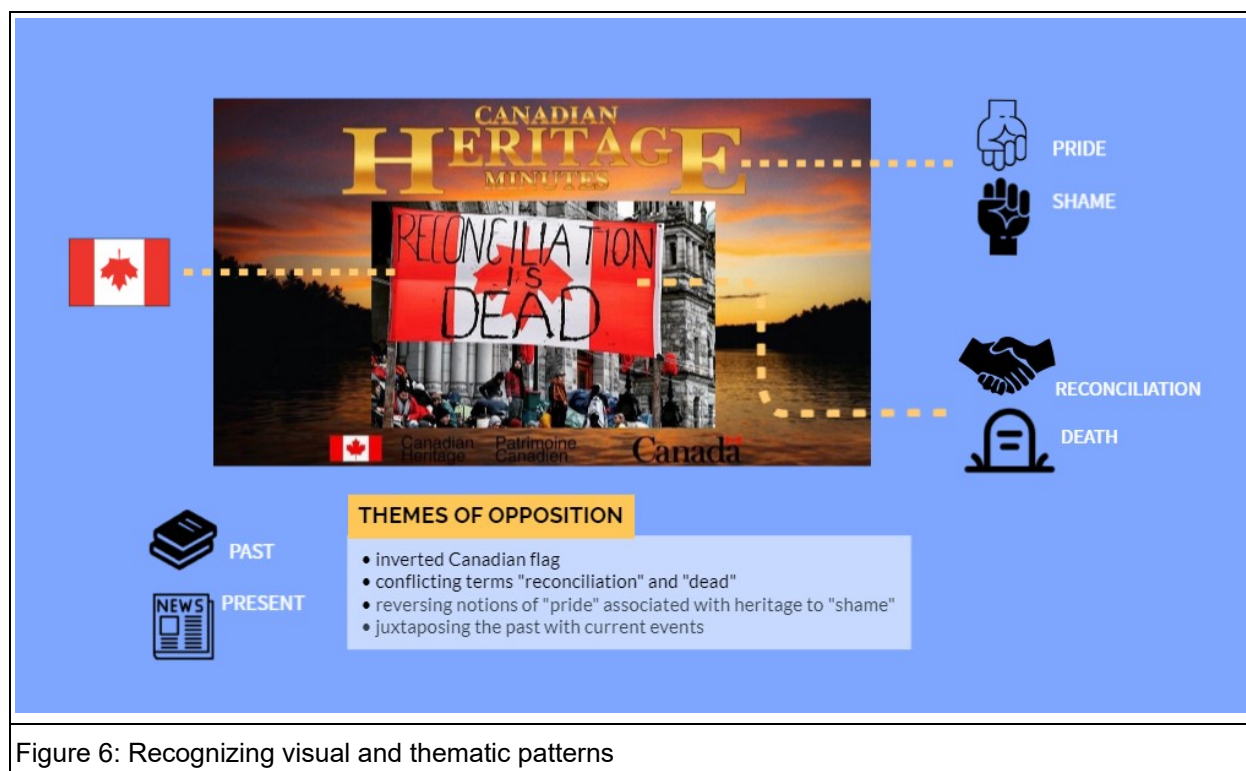


Figure 6: Recognizing visual and thematic patterns

Contextualizing this image requires some investigation. This begins with visual and textual patterns. A cursory internet search shows that “Canadian Heritage Minutes” is a federally funded series of short videos (first launched for television in 1991) which dramatize notably moments in Canadian history (Figure 7). The meme mimics the wilderness silhouette and stylized titles of the original videos and centres the image of “Reconciliation is dead”.

3 why is it funny?

THE JOKE:

colonial violence in Canada destroying the possibility of “reconciliation” with Indigenous people is not new, but national “heritage”



the memetic trope replaces the original background with a similar wilderness silhouette and stylized titles; each iteration frames less “prestigious” moments in Canadian history

previous versions of this meme have included the invention of Ketchup Chips, a viral video of the Mayor of Toronto smoking crack.




a general search shows a federally-funded series of short videos (first launched for television in 1991) which dramatize “important” moments in Canadian history.




Figure 7: Tracing memetic context


A reverse image search (TinEye) of the photo shows it was originally posted to Twitter by climate activist Ta’Kaiya Blaney of the Tla’amin Nation (Figure 8). The photo was taken on

the steps of the provincial legislature in Victoria, British Columbia during a demonstration. The timestamp of the post and the text contained within it fixes the image to traceable event.




A reverse image search of the photo shows it was originally posted to Twitter by climate activist Ta'Kaiya Blaney of the Tla'amin Nation on February 10th, 2020

4 what could be the motivation for producing it?



NEWS

What information is available about the incident mentioned in the tweet? What are the similarities and differences in the sources?



"Reconciliation"

The term " " has a complex history and political connotations in Canada. This can be used as an entry point for further exploration. The centering of current events also connects settler-colonialism to present conditions, disrupting the tendency to historicize its impacts.

#AllEyesOnWetsuweten

In early 2020, a series of railway blockades across Indigenous territories in Canada were set up in solidarity with hereditary chiefs of the unceded Wetsuweten territory in British Columbia. The chiefs had been attempting to block construction of an oil pipeline which had not obtained the necessary consultation with the community, yet were subjected to raids by the militarized arm of the RCMP

signalling connections

Is there a deeper conversation surrounding Reconciliation? What is the significance of the inverted Canadian flag and its placement in front of the provincial legislature?

Calendar

How does the photo relate to the situation in the Wet'suwe t'en territory? Reconciliation? Red dresses?

Figure 8: Unpacking memetic context

Question #4: What is the motivation for making this meme? There is no single answer to this question, but the discussion of possibilities is the goal. The photo in the meme itself is a hyperlink to ongoing discourses and demonstrations. What does the Twitter account of the original photo poster tell us about the issue? Does this person appear in any news articles or

other discussions that could shed more light on this context? What do the comments and emoji reactions to the original post reveal? And most importantly, could there be a deeper meaning that is not obvious to the viewer? Asking these cursory questions opens space for social discussions that do not have “correct” answers or linear outlines. How does “Canada” interpret *reconciliation*? How does it differ from what this meme is expressing? “Reconciliation is dead” is a meme in and of itself—condensing the complexities and history that led up to this moment into a digestible and meaningful expression. The term “reconciliation” has a complex history and political connotation in Canada that can be used as an entry point for further exploration, but the direct appropriation of current events (photography) also connects settler-colonialism to present conditions, disrupting the tendency to historicize its impacts.

At the end of each deconstruction activity, ask students to think about the conclusions they have come to through their critical questioning process. What sort of information would change their perspective, and where might they find it? The creator of the meme is ultimately responsible for the meanings they’ve put forth, and thus our own interpretations remain secondary, regardless of the methods or critical rigor we have applied. Definitive answers about intended meanings can only be found with the original creator of the work. Looking at memes that represent Indigenous perspectives is an attempt to decenter the dominant settler-colonial narratives through an accessible classroom intervention, but it is crucial to identify the limitations of this approach. Calls to “decolonize” institutions, methods and thinking have become increasingly popular in education, but as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) point out, “Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (p.1). Public education in Canada is not only anchored in settler-colonialism, but is a tool of its reproduction

(Coulthard, 2014). Despite the best of intentions on the part of individual schools or instructors, “social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that... can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p.1). Rather than thinking of this approach as a move towards the rhetoric of “reconciliation” which aims to manufacture a false sense of settler innocence and equality, I will position the exercises I have outlined as simply an attempt to disrupt settler-colonial narratives within the confines of its institutions. Applying the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing to education [is asking]: What are we told by the dominant group? What hegemony governs curriculum, news media, general and cultural discourse? How can counter narratives and other ways of “seeing” contribute to a deeper perceptual clarity of the world we live in, and motivate meaningful social justice?

As Lindquist observes, “The central goal of critical pedagogy has been to replace faith to reason and belief with knowledge; yet this has systematically ignored the deep emotional structure of faith and belief” (Lindquist, 2004, pg.190-1). Studies have repeatedly shown that when discussing topics related to racism and white supremacy, jumping into “facts” and critical literature is often met with emotional pushback that can be pedagogically halting (Nelson, Adams & Salter, 2013; Bonam et al., 2019). Subjects that confront dominant social narratives can carry equally emotional charges for teachers (Zemblyas, 2012). Memes are a way of enticing engagement with sensitive topics in ways that are perceived as less threatening (humour). This creates virtual spaces to explore “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 2000; Zembylas, 2014) at an individual’s pace while taking the affective attachments that govern our relationship to knowledge into consideration.

Chapter IX - Conclusion

This project provides a critical analysis of the only multi-lesson digital media literacy resource that is purpose-built for secondary classrooms in Canada and has highlighted elements of its hidden curricula. The overall reach and impact of this resource in classrooms, however, is unknown. The research is limited in scope due to a lack of input from instructors who have used the *CTRL-F* material or other available digital media literacy lesson content in their classrooms. It relies on available accounts in the academic literature for perspective on the approaches of individual teachers, which have been sparse. However, the observations of this analysis seek to inform future professional development for instructors that are struggling to keep up with rapid shifts in this hyper-mediated world. Getting serious about teaching digital literacy requires a radical rethink of how we approach K-12 media education. Without robust policies or meaningful supports for professional development, teachers are left with one-size-fits-all evaluation methods and shallow, authority-driven lesson content which masquerades as critical instruction.

Since 2020, *MediaSmarts* and *CIVIX* have received a combined \$4.45M to educate K-12 students about misinformation but have produced little more than a handful of lessons which discourage critical thinking and ignore the roots of the “post-truth” era problems they claim to address. Ensuring students are less vulnerable to “fake news” and misinformation in the digital age requires more than superficial checklists to determine source credibility— what is needed are consistent interventions that build critical habits of mind outside the confines of a lesson. Encouraging students to ignore bias and outsource their thinking to pre-approved sources fails to prepare them for situations in their everyday lives that will not come with professional fact-checkers or a rating from Wikipedia. Addressing the core issue of misinformation and how it

spreads must include dynamic discussions about representation, bias, and the human impulse to seek out information that reinforces our own beliefs. I always begin my workshops by reminding students that the most important questions in life cannot be Googled. We must build a healthy sense of scepticism and flexible thinking to become our own reliable judges of information.

Reflecting on my initial shock over the lack of attention paid to digital media literacy in provincial ELA policies and the dearth of reported interventions in Canada, I suspect it is my professional experiences with dedicated instructors and my optimism for digital media that have fueled this reaction. The neoliberal capture of public funding structures is certainly not new or shocking, but the near erasure of media literacy from the minds of Canadian policy makers and institutional researchers should concern everyone. This leaves space for corporate-backed charities and companies with ulterior motives to fill in the gaps, which is ineffective and ultimately counterproductive. I have found digital media and to be a genuine gift to instruction and meaningful vehicle for learning in and outside of the classroom. Modernising approaches to media education need not rely on expensive technology, or expertly trained teachers— it simply requires a sustained philosophical commitment to critical intermedia principle. Just as I have positioned my biases and experiences that influence my work for ideological transparency, critical intermedia pedagogy seeks to bring to light the ideological dimensions of knowledge and information. Contrary to the messages of programs like *CTRL-F* bias needs to be unpacked and the myth of objectivity should be put to rest.

Critical intermedia pedagogy is an expression

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Table of CTRL-F Lesson Video Transcripts

Appendix A: CTRL-F Resource Video Transcripts	
Video	Transcript
Video 1- CIVIX Explains Information Pollution [Runtime:2:17]	<p><i>The internet gives everyone in society a voice in the public sphere. But when anyone can post anything online, the result is a lot of information. Some of this is trustworthy, but a lot of it isn't. On social media and search platforms, all information is made to look the same. It can be hard to tell what is from a credible source, such as a professional news organization, and what is less reliable.</i></p> <p><i>Social media networks make it easy for wrong information to spread, which means we hear a lot about the 'fake news' problem.</i></p> <p><i>But what is fake news, exactly? The phrase gets used to describe all kinds of wrong information — from articles intended to deceive people, to misleading memes and clickbait headlines, to conspiracy theories. Some people call news reports they don't like 'fake news' as a way to discredit reliable sources, which only adds to the confusion. To understand the problem of wrong information online, it helps to define and categorize it.</i></p> <p><i>False information can be sorted into two categories: misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation is wrong, but the person sharing it believes it to be true. While misinformation can be damaging, its intent is not to cause harm. Examples could include a factual error caused by misunderstanding, a manipulated image, or a real photo that appears with a made up story.</i></p> <p><i>Disinformation, on the other hand, is deliberately false information created and shared to cause harm. It has the goal of confusing people about what is true, and influencing how they think and act. For example, a false rumour circulated about a political candidate that causes others to doubt their trustworthiness.</i></p> <p><i>Together, all this mis- and disinformation can be thought of as "information pollution." Unreliable stories or posts can be interesting or funny or spark an emotion that makes us want to believe and share them with friends. People contribute to information pollution by sharing false and misleading content. Before believing or sharing something, stop and ask "who made this, and why?" This is the first step in combating information pollution to become a more informed citizen.</i></p>

<p>Video 2- Intro to CTRL-F [Runtime:3:00]</p>	<p><i>My name is Jane and I'm a senior disinformation reporter with BuzzFeed News and for the last three and a half years or so I've been investigating hoaxes, conspiracies, mis- and disinformation, spending my days digging into little clues that we find on social media, stringing them together and trying to figure out who's behind all of this, how disinformation spreads and, what the truth really is.</i></p> <p><i>Over this series of videos I'm going to introduce you to three key skills that you can use to investigate information online and my colleague, digital literacy expert, Mike Caulfield will demonstrate simple but powerful ways to use these skills to sort fact from fiction and determine what is credible.</i></p> <p><i>It's no secret that the web is full of a lot of nonsense and a lot of that nonsense is relatively harmless, whether it's fake bakes on TikTok or photoshopped images on Instagram, but some of it is deadly serious. Misinformation works because of our emotions. When we feel a heightened emotion, whether that's anxiety, anger, panic, or the opposite, extreme elation, what we want to do is we want to pass that information on to other people. So if there is a message, online whether it's a piece of news, or a meme, or a video, or whatever that you really want to send to your friends, to your family, to your followers then that is the moment to sort of pause and say maybe I should Google this real quick.</i></p> <p><i>If you've had a media literacy course before there's a good chance you've been told that what you need to do is look deeply at the document or web page or photo in front of you and think about whether that is true or whether that is false. That is not our approach here. What we want you to do is get off that page, get off that photo, go out onto the web and see what other people say about it. And what I hope you'll find as we move forward is that while getting to absolute certainty is a never-ending task, getting confident enough to make the sort of decisions that you need to make is completely within your grasp and a skill that you can learn in a very short amount of time.</i></p>
<p>Video 3: Investigate The Source with Jane Lytvenenko [Runtime:1:34]</p>	<p><i>There is so much information online it can be really hard to process everything that we see. And it's not always clear who has produced the content, and for what reason, and whether it can be trusted. Historically people didn't have to worry so much about the reputation of the media that they relied on. Those sources were limited and content was coming directly from an authoritative source. But online there are so many different groups publishing and sharing information through different channels and all the different motives. These include: news organizations, governments, political campaigns, businesses, advocacy groups, think tanks, universities, community groups, individuals, and more. Very often we get information shared by friends, family, or celebrities. And while we recognize the person who shared it we don't know anything about the original source.</i></p> <p><i>So when we're consuming information it's really important to gain some context about the information source, including the purpose behind the message. When investigating sources there are key questions we want to ask: One is, who's responsible for the information that we're looking at? And two is, what is the reputation of the source? These are simple skills that we can use to find answers to these questions which Mike will begin to show you in the next video. You might be surprised by how simple it is to build a habit of investigating sources.</i></p>

<p>Video 4: Skill: Just Add Wikipedia [Runtime:4:32]</p>	<p><i>There are countless sources of information out there. So what do we do when we find an unfamiliar source to determine if it's something that we want to trust? Now, this may surprise you. But I'd advise you to do with fact checkers around the world do as their first step, I want you to go to Wikipedia, and get a summary of what that person that publication or group behind that website is all about.</i></p> <p><i>Now, Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia or reference source, with entries being added and updated all the time. And I know you may have heard bad things about Wikipedia in the past. But the Wikipedia community has strict rules about sourcing facts to reliable sources in any errors in Wikipedia, are usually corrected very quickly.</i></p> <p><i>And because authors must adopt a neutral point of view, its articles are often the best available introduction to a subject on the web. Now, in some cases, like if you're writing a research report, you don't want to use Wikipedia as your main source of information. But it can be really useful for gaining context to help orient you to what a source is all about.</i></p> <p><i>So in this video, I'm going to show you a simple technique to use Wikipedia to assess sources. So here's an example. This is an article from the New York Times reporting that the e cigarette vaping company JUUL is being accused of intentionally buying ads on sites like Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network in order to target teenagers. So what we do is this, we go up to the search bar here, we're going to strip off everything from that forward slash over. And we're just going to type Wikipedia here. Now that's nothing special about this search.</i></p> <p><i>This is just a search, you'll see it floats the Wikipedia article to the top of the search results.</i></p> <p><i>What do we look for on that Wikipedia page? It varies.</i></p> <p><i>Rather than giving you a checklist of things to look for on a Wikipedia page, I just want you to focus on two organizing questions. First, is the site or organization, the type of source that you thought it was? And second, does the new information make the source more or less trustworthy? So for instance, we go to the New York Times, we first look on the box to the right, it says is a daily newspaper founded in 1851, it's been around for about 170 years now which doesn't necessarily mean a source is reliable. But the fact that has been around so long shows at the very least it's a well established organization. There are also reliable sources that haven't been around long at all. Of course, these pieces of information only provide clues or signals, we can't draw conclusions from any one of them individually. But together they start to paint a picture.</i></p> <p><i>Then we read the article for more details, we see that it's an American newspaper with worldwide influence and readership that is considered a national newspaper record. It also has won Pulitzer Prizes for its journalism, in fact, more Pulitzer Prizes than any other newspaper, if we expected this to be a major news source. All of these signs match our expectations. Remember that all claims made in Wikipedia are backed up by citations. So you can always scroll down if you want to verify those citations firsthand.</i></p> <p><i>Now, here's an example from a publication called the Buffalo Chronicle. Now the headline may seem plausible. But before we even think about the claim being made, we're gonna investigate the source. If you just added Wikipedia to the URL, you won't see an entry for it in the search results. But what you do see is it appears in Wikipedia article called list of fake news sites. Clicking into that article, we can read that the buffalo chronicle post fake news, often Canadian, if we wanted to investigate further, we could scroll down and check the citations to learn more. Sometimes, these dubious sites do publish Real News. But regardless of whether or not a particular story is accurate, this is</i></p>
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not the source we want to get our news from. Now, there's nothing magic about this technique, right? This will work in any browser, it'll work with any search engine, if you're using a phone or a tablet, you just open a new tab in search the name of the site along with the word Wikipedia, and you get to the Wikipedia entry just as quickly.

So what happens if you do this Wikipedia trick, you don't find an entry? Major news sources usually have an entry on Wikipedia. So if you think you're reading something from a trusted major news organization, and they don't have a Wikipedia page, that could be a sign that is not the source you thought it was. Now that doesn't mean the story is wrong, right? That doesn't mean it's a bad source. But it's enough that you might want to try to find the story from a more established source, or at the very least, slow down and check everything twice.

<p>Video 5:Skill: Advanced Wikipedia: Bias & Agenda [Runtime:6:07]</p>	<p><i>When evaluating sources using Wikipedia, some entries are going to be easier to interpret than others. If it's a source known to fabricate news or if it's a strong standards-based professional organization Wikipedia is going to make that sort of thing pretty clear, often in that top part, the part we call the synopsis. So that's great if it works out that way, but sometimes you're going to have to read past those first few lines to get a fuller picture and sometimes you're going to need to dig into some of the terms used to get a better idea of what that organization is all about.</i></p> <p><i>Let's look at an example of an interpretation problem that can trip some people up. So you come to this story about technology and mental health. It's from a site called Vox. You add Wikipedia. You skim through the page. You see the site is described as left-of-center. Okay, here's another example. This time from the Wikipedia article from the National Post. Now this is saying the National Post has a conservative lean in its opinion pages. Now what does all this mean? What does this mean as we look at these articles? Can we trust these sources or are these sources too biased? People are really interested in bias and bias can matter. We could do a whole course just on bias. If you're looking at how media shapes reality on the larger scale, you're gonna have to deal with bias. But that's not what we're doing here. Here we're doing quick checks to determine whether the information is reliable enough to read or to share and we actually don't need to care too much about bias at that stage. The concept we care more about than bias at this stage is agenda. So what's the difference? A bias is a preconceived opinion for or against something. It can cause even professionals to make errors that they might not otherwise make. Agenda is about what an organization is set up to do. That is what an organization is designed to achieve day in and day out. Reputable media sources have standards. They hire professional journalists. They correct mistakes and this commitment to accuracy matters and it's going to be there as long as they're a real ethical legitimate news source, regardless of whether the source is considered to be right-leaning or left-leaning. You may not agree with all the commentary a right or a left-leaning source shares. You might not even agree with the selection of stories that they decide to run. But with an ethical news source you can be relatively confident that they are trying to get the basic facts correct when they report the news.</i></p> <p><i>The purpose of Vox, the agenda, is to explain news to readers, not to win elections, not to sell you medications, right? It was founded by reporters, not political consultants, scam artists or the propaganda arm of a foreign government. It's a news organization and they are there to report the news. It's what they are set up to do. Another example might make this a little more clear. Say you come across this YouTube video. Now you consider sending this to a friend whose burger of choice these days is a plant-based Beyond Meat burger. Now this video claims ingredients commonly found in fake meat could cause cancer and it directs you to visit a site called Clean Food Facts for more information. Now, maybe you're worried for your friend or maybe you just think vegan meat is stupid and you want to prove it to them. Whatever the reason, you think about sharing this video. But this is precisely when you need to check.</i></p> <p><i>Now, we're not making a final decision here on whether plant or meat-based burgers are better. Again, we're just doing quick, preliminary checks and what I need to know right now is is this a good source of information about plant-based meat substitutes? Now if I go up to the address bar and add Wikipedia, we find that the group responsible for this content is a lobby group. A big part of the job of lobby groups is to sway public opinion in favor of their clients and in this case it looks like one of their clients is industrial meat</i></p>
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producers. So I think you can see what the conflict of interest there might be, right? Of course, maybe you come to an article like this and you don't know what a lobbyist is. Good news on that. Wikipedia has you covered there, as well. You hover over the related word on Wikipedia, get a quick definition or click through for more detail in the article on that term itself. But back to our meat lobbyist. You want to know more. We can click through associated individuals and it looks like in this case the group's founder Richard Berman is a well-known lobbyist who has worked to loosen environmental and safety regulations and each of the claims about him here is sourced below. Does this information tell us everything on the site is wrong? Not necessarily. In this case, probably not, but it does tell us that the site is not here to inform us. I want to stress that we are only guessing here, but it sure does seem like this is a site financed by meat producers to persuade us to keep buying their product or perhaps to encourage legislation to make it harder to sell plant-based alternatives.

And that's why whenever you approach an unfamiliar source, you always want to ask yourself what is this group set up to do, right? Is it a professional organization with a purpose to inform? Is it a research organization whose purpose is to expand our knowledge? Or is it something else? And if it's something else, maybe find another source, right? Or at the very least proceed with caution with the source in front of you.

<p>Video 6: Evaluate Expertise [Runtime:4:31]</p>	<p>When we talk about what makes a good source we're generally talking about expertise, right? Now, expertise isn't just about being smart. One of the common misconceptions is that we're looking for the smartest people, right? So we end up believing, falsely, that a person from a prestigious university is going to know more on any issue than a person from somewhere else or that an astronaut is going to be smart about say vaccines, right? But expertise is about domain knowledge. This is the deep understanding of a specific topic. And this has been really important in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. Since the beginning we have seen economists, tech industry entrepreneurs, psychologists, chiropractors, politicians, social media influencers weighing in on how to respond to the disease from a public health perspective. And while some of them might be generally very smart people, the problem is that none of them have a deep understanding of viruses. None of them are epidemiologists, with an understanding of how viruses spread. No matter how well-intentioned they may be, they are not good sources of public health information.</p> <p>Here's an example. This is Elon Musk from March saying this will all be over in April. Now, Musk builds Teslas, right, an electric car. He runs another company that literally launches rockets into space. But none of that helps because he doesn't know anything about viruses. So how can we evaluate expertise? How do we know if someone is talking about the field they have a lot of experience, in a field in which they have a history of being careful with the truth or if they're just spreading unfounded opinion? Most prominent individuals and organizations do have Wikipedia pages so you can use our Wikipedia trick to help you here as well.</p> <p>If someone doesn't have a Wikipedia page you can still run a quick search of their name to see if you can find any evidence that they have the appropriate domain knowledge. Recently we've seen some doctors like Dr. Phil going on cable news and offering health advice, so in this case a quick trip to his Wikipedia page shows that his training is in psychology. Psychologists know a lot about human behavior but you would never visit a psychologist to get treated for a virus so maybe we don't want to listen to his opinion on this specific public health issue, especially if it contradicts advice that most experts seem to agree on.</p> <p>Now compare that to this person's page: Dorothy Crawford has a Wikipedia page that's a lot shorter, but we see that she is a professor of microbiology and she has published a number of books on virology for the prestigious Oxford University Press. Does this mean we just trust people like Dr. Crawford? Not exactly. Experts disagree and expertise is hard to judge so more often than not with complex issues you don't want just one expert opinion. Your best possible source, at least to start with, is going to be one that makes an effort to reach out to many experts and synthesize what they say in a disinterested way. This is one reason why newspaper reporting is still really valuable. A good reporter tries to understand the places where there is consensus and dissensus among experts and accurately reflect that. They are in a position to know on the basis of the expertise they have access to, but also their skills and sorting through it.</p> <p>You see a very similar pattern with professional organizations. If I'm going to the web to find information on Covid-19 I'm more likely to trust the public health agency of Canada than any one expert or single doctor because these organizations aren't about advancing a single theory, they're about sorting through very divergent opinions and trying to find the signal in the noise. Now having expertise doesn't mean that someone can't make mistakes or update their thinking. Even during this pandemic we've seen experts change their recommendations and that's going to happen when so much is</p>
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	<p>unknown and new information is coming out constantly. But the sign of a real expert is someone that has the right domain knowledge to evaluate that new information, draw those new conclusions, and the most useful experts are those that take care to tell you not only what they think but put that in the context of what their colleagues think as well.</p>
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<p>Video 7: Check The Claim [Runtime:2:14]</p>	<p>People make claims all the time. I'm making a claim right now. A claim isn't necessarily a statement of truth. A claim is just something someone says is true. Some claims can be factually proven while others are a matter of opinion or interpretation. For example, the claim that humans have walked on the moon is verifiably true. This is an event that happened. We have data to support it unequivocally. We planted a flag up there. Claims that are based on judgments are different. We can still evaluate them based on the evidence provided, but we can't really state whether claim is definitely true or definitely false. For example, some people might say that cats are better than dogs and I would think that you're terribly wrong. Each claim would be supported by evidence, but which interpretation you support- dogs- might have more to do with your personal preferences than with anything else.</p> <p>It's easier to evaluate factual claims, but we can collect context about any claim that will help us put it into perspective and inform our own opinions. When we're evaluating claims in general, the best thing we can do is rely on the highest quality information we have available at any given time, even if there's uncertainty. There are many fact-checking organizations that can help us do this. Fact-checking organizations like Snopes Politifact, AFP and factcheck.org all routinely publish extremely detailed breakdowns of what is real and what is fake. Many professional journalism organizations also research and report on viral claims and debunk misinformation. When we're looking at claims, usually what we want to know is answers to questions like: Did this happen? Is this real? Can I verify it? The next videos will introduce skills we can use to quickly and effectively find answers to these kinds of questions including relying on better coverage and looking for those fact checks.</p>
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<p>Video 8: Skill: Check Other Sources [Runtime:4:15]</p>	<p>So far we've looked at ways to evaluate information by researching the reputation of the source, but what if the source is low quality or what if we just can't determine its reliability at all? The thing is, most of the time we don't really care about the source, we just want to find out if something is true or valid or plausible. So if the source is unknown or not what you expected, here's a second strategy: verify the claim with other sources. What does that look like in practice?</p> <p>Well, here's one example. Here's a claim that NASA is putting metal hats on seals to monitor climate change. Now, this is from a source I don't recognize, so here's a simple move: forget about the source. You don't actually care about the source. I don't care about this source. I'm on a mission. I just want to know: is NASA putting metal hats on seals? That's my mission. So let's go and see if others are covering this. Just type some keywords into the search bar and hit enter. Now when we do that, we see that- wait for it- a ton of sites are reporting this. In fact, here at the top we see this story from NASA itself. There seem to be other stories from a variety of news sources. We could look at one of those if we wanted. If we didn't know these sites we could use our Wikipedia trick.</p> <p>When we dig in we find, yeah, more or less, NASA is using seals and metal hats to track climate change. And we could quibble a little bit, here. It looks like the group that actually put the hats on the seals was a French research group, but the photo is real, the story is real. And notice what we didn't do here. We didn't sit around for 10 minutes thinking, "does this sound plausible?" and we didn't stare at the photo to figure out if it was photoshopped, right? Because, let's face it, it actually looks pretty photoshopped. Instead, what we did was see if other sources confirmed it and in this case they had. The claim is true and now we can share it with anyone we want, which let's face it, will be every single person that we know okay. From cute to a little bit disturbing. You probably know who Greta Thunberg is, the young climate activist. So here we have a claim from Twitter saying that she is actually an actor named Estella Renee being paid by a climate change advocacy group.</p> <p>Now versions of this claim have been appearing all over social media and we see similar claims about so-called crisis actors all the time, generally connected to false conspiracy theories, but before we reject this entirely we're still going to ask: has this been independently verified? Are reputable sources reporting it? So let's go through the steps. So here's our claim. We search for "Greta Thunberg Estella Renee" and once we do that, right up at the top we see a site called Snopes. Now Snopes is an independent fact-checking site. It's known for its rigorous well-referenced investigations of viral claims and if we click through to see what Snopes says we find Snopes has rated this false.</p> <p>Now one thing I do want you to pay attention to here is the rating. The rating is important, but, more importantly you don't have to take their word for it. If I go down to the actual Snopes articles you'll see not only how they came to their ruling here- hint: the journey of Greta Thunberg from single student to activist leader has been obsessively documented. We know her parents, we know her history. But between each of those claims is a link, or several links, backing all of this up with documentary evidence. It feels a bit silly that we have to go and rebut this sort of thing, but checking the research here will not only keep you honest but help you stay informed for when others bring such claims up.</p> <p>In summary, very often when news or information reaches us, we act like we must make a decision based on the particular story or source that reached us first. But the web is</p>
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	<p>abundant. If it's a true story, there should be multiple other sources reporting it. If it's a false story, it's very likely that a reputable organization has already fact checked that claim for you.</p>
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Video 9: Skill Advanced Claim Check [Runtime:3:24]	<p>So, here's a pretty convenient thing about fact checking claims. No matter where the claim appears, the steps to check it are essentially the same. It's really just a matter of where you're taking your keywords from. Let's look at an example from Tik Tok. Here actress Shailene Woodley says that by the year 2050, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish. Shailene Woodley: "More plastic than fish."</p> <p>Now, that's a pretty provocative statement, but is it true. Is it accurate? Celebrities are not always the best sources of information. So let's use the same strategy to check this claim. You can use the same search skill, of course, whether you're on YouTube or Twitch or just checking rumors that your family spreads through direct message or Facebook. We start by entering keywords into the search bar.</p> <p>Here we'll do "2050 fish plastic" and hit enter and when we do that we find that there's a CBC article on this issue. We recognize that source as being Canada's national public broadcaster. Now we don't get a ruling up at the top the way that Snopes gives us a ruling, but we get a heck of a lot of context here. Here's the original source of the claim and here's the research source on that. And initially it looks pretty good. It uses stats from high quality peer-reviewed research published in Science but as the article says, it gets a little bit murky from there. The study may have overestimated plastic and underestimated fish. In fact, if you go to the BBC article on this, you'll find that the author of the study they used to estimate the number of fish in the ocean has revised his estimates upward, in fact, way upward. It turns out there are a lot more fish in the sea. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I had to do that. It had to be done. In any case, it's a hard call. This figure might be right, it might be wrong, it's just not as clear-cut as it initially seemed. As the author notes, it's complicated.</p> <p>So what are the big takeaways here? Plastic in the ocean isn't good and a lot of plastic in the ocean isn't good at all, but smart people do disagree on the priority reducing plastic should take to other social goals right. So if you're an advocate trying to get people to take plastic waste seriously, to prioritize, it's worth, thinking about what you want to hang your argument on. Do you want it to hang on a number like this, which is shocking but perhaps exaggerated or do you want to find facts and figures that are more solid and more durable? Maybe ones that get to the heart of the real harm done.</p> <p>For example, the BBC article makes the point that the real problem isn't the precise amount of plastic but the fact that plastic does not go away. What we put in the ocean now will be there for many, many years, accumulating year after year with no end in sight. Not only is that truth more durable but it's more core to your concern as well. It may be less likely to backfire on you if your statistic is challenged. Sharing an article making that point may help elevate the conversation in a way a more shocking statistic may not</p>
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Video 11-Skill-
Click Through
& Find
[Runtime:5:05]

When stories and claims travel online they can lose important context and sometimes misleading or deceptive information can take its place. So when looking at a story or a photo that reaches you, it's important to get as close to the original source as possible. Think of it like going back to the first person in a game of broken telephone. You know the message that reached you, but to find out whether it's been garbled you've got to go back to the original source. The good news is it's relatively easy to get closer to the original source and once you have found that source, it's easy to figure out whether the source has been properly represented.

Let's look at an example: the headline of this story claims that the majority of Canadians support defunding the police. Now this is a case of re-reporting. Often a website will take information originally reported somewhere else. The site may summarize that original report, cut parts out, blend it with other information, other sources on the same topic and that can be helpful, but a lot can be left out in that process of re-reporting. If we scroll down, we see that there is a link included to the original reporting source, Global News, and we're lucky here since we're given that link. But if the site hadn't provided that link it wouldn't matter. You can usually find the original story using the search terms, the same sort of techniques we used earlier, to see if a claim was reported by other sources.

Now what do we learn when we look at this Global News article? Well, so Global commissioned a poll from the polling firm Ipsos and it found that 51 percent of Canadians support the idea of defunding the police. Now first we notice the headline here is a little bit different than on the story that we found. The original headline referred to a majority of Canadians, but this feels a little bit exaggerated since in this case the majority is very slim- just 51 to 49. The Global headline here is much more measured, probably more accurate, saying Canadians are divided on the issue. Looking at the Global story we also get more context. First, the article describes what defund the police means which is important context for this discussion. Getting into the habit of tracing information to the original source can help bring you to higher quality sources, sources which often provide this more complete or more nuanced story.

One way misinformation can spread is through false context. False context or false framing is when real content is shared with a false comment or summary that misrepresents the story. Take this Tweet. This person shared a surprising story on Twitter claiming that the NDP leader praised US president Donald Trump and said that Canada should adopt US policies on race. Now initially this looks good. The link that they shared goes to the Globe and Mail, a reliable source. The headline suggests that the story is actually about Singh asking Prime Minister Trudeau to address systemic racism in Canada. But there's two parts to this, right? There's the linked story, right, which is from a reputable source which we know and then there's this reaction to what's said in that story, which here is provided by someone that we don't know.

So what do we do? Well we start by just clicking into the story right? That's step one. For step two we want to see if this claim is accurate or if we're missing additional context. Now we can read the whole story from top to bottom but a faster way to check this is to search the page for keywords, so let's do that here.

Many of you will already know how to search a web page but just in case on desktop browsers you use ctrl-f, command-f on a Mac. On a phone, use this little drop down on your browser-this is usually in the upper right hand corner. It says "find in page" or something like that. We plug in the search terms and since we're interested in whether Singh actually praised Trump let's just start with "Trump." This brings us immediately to

the quote in question where Singh does reference Trump but it's hardly praise. He accuses Trudeau of doing even less than Trump in terms of policy change, but also says that Trump has been horrible on this issue.

If we go back to our ctrl+f trick and plug-in "policy" we see that this is the only reference to policy in the article. Singh isn't exactly saying that Canada should adopt US policies. It's an interesting article. Singh is certainly critical of how the Canadian government is addressing systemic racism, but his response was completely misrepresented by the person who shared the story on Twitter. The upshot is this: if a source that you don't know or trust is summarizing a link for you, verify their summary by clicking through and executing a simple search

Video 12-Skill-
Check the date
[Runtime:1:37]

Okay, so here's another skill that will help you locate original context and this one is so simple you may want to laugh. I want you to check the date. That's it. This may sound amazingly obvious, but again you have to trust me. People don't do it. Tragedy results. So let's look at an example. Here's a person sharing a story about Donald Trump. Now apparently he's saying he wants people to get out and vote in November, no matter how sick they are. Just go to the polls, even if you're sick, even if you're dying. In our Covid-19 world this is enraging, right? And just as before the source looks good. The story came from the Independent, a reputable enough newspaper. So did Trump really say this in the middle of a global pandemic? If you click through to the actual story and check the date you'll see that Trump did say this but, and this is a really significant, but he said it way back in 2016, right, years ago. It's maybe not the most compassionate thing to say, but it wasn't said during the Covid-19 pandemic. He's not telling people, at least here, to go to polling places while infected with the novel coronavirus.

Dates are the simplest piece of contextual information surrounding a story. When a story happened makes a huge difference in how we interpret it and information circulating out of date is a common cause of misinformation. The solution, though, is really simple: click through, check the date.

Video 13-Skill-
Search The
History of an
Image
[Runtime:4:13]

A lot of the information we encounter on a daily basis is visual, so a lot of the misinformation we encounter is also visual. Images are one example. Images can be manipulated, used deceptively. Often things that look real are photoshopped. Sometimes things that look photoshopped are real. In-context photos are mis-captioned and mis-summarized constantly- it's practically a web tradition. Now the good news is with a few simple steps you can often find the photo in its original context and understand the meaning of the photo yourself. So let me let me show you some quick steps to do this. First let's look at this photo that went viral back in March. It's a dolphin and some fish swimming in the water which might make a nice photo on its own but it's accompanied by a pretty shocking claim the water of Venice has become so clear from the coronavirus lockdown that this person claims, at least, that the dolphins have returned to the canals for the first time in 60 years. Now there's been lots of images and posts making similar claims. Maybe you've seen some of these, the phrase "nature is healing" and a lot of the images and claims are true. But is this one, real or fake? Now we could spend all day staring at this photo and trying to figure out if it's been photoshopped but instead I'm going to show you a quick trick that will help us figure out if a) the photo is real and b) if it's showing what it claims to show. And as you'll see in a moment, these are really two separate but equally important questions. Now just like we did with text we can search images in Google to get additional context. We just right click on the image and select "search Google for image." If you're using a mobile device just press the image and hold and select "search Google for image." Now, in this case we get lucky, sort of, right? There's lots of stories here that seem to repeat this claim, but the most credible source on the page, National Geographic, a magazine in the society that looks at precisely these sorts of stories, seems to feature the photograph in a story that implies this is false. So we we click on the article we use our CTRL-F to quickly search for "dolphin" and see if we can learn more about this image. In this case we learned that the photos are real but they weren't taken in Venice. Reading further we can see that the reporter has already done the hard work for us. They've traced these images back to their source. Often when images go viral we can count on professional journalists and fact-checkers to do the work of establishing proper context for us and that turns out to be the situation here. Once in a while, though, you'll have to do the work yourself. For example, here's a photo from an anti-lockdown protest showing protesters holding signs that say things like "defund science," "defend my right to die" and, again, we could spend hours debating whether this image was photoshopped and staring at the pixels or we can do a quick search and see if we can learn more about the source of this image. For this example we'll use a site called TinEye. TinEye works in every browser. It's a good alternative if you're not using Chrome. In this case we can right click the image select 'copy image address' and then we go to TinEye. We right click on the Toolbar press "paste" and hit return. Here we see a list of other places where this image has appeared. Now look at this: Snopes. Snopes is already up the top with an article from yesterday. This is actually new from last time I looked at it, but we could do this even if Snopes wasn't there yet. We see that NBC news, a reputable organization has used the image recently and we click into the NBC News link. It brings us to a story from April 20th about how Facebook has been removing events and here's our photo right at the top with a caption giving us the original context: protest, Colorado, April 19th. So the photo is from a protest, but notice that the content of the signs is not what was in the photo from the tweet. The photo in the tweet was photoshopped, but we figured that out by using some simple tricks to find

the original source not by doing pixel-level analysis, not by looking for signs of manipulation.

Appendices

APPENDIX B: Table of Canadian Teacher Federations and media literacy Resources

Appendix B: Active Canadian Teacher Federations and Listed Media/Digital Literacy Resources		
Group	Notes	Resources Provided?
Alberta Teachers Association	(all MediaSmarts+ random youtube stuff) https://teachers-ab.libguides.com/criticalthinking	Yes
Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://www.aefo.on.ca/fr/	No
Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://www.aefnb.ca/	No
Association Québécoise de professeur(e)s de français	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://aqpf.qc.ca/	No
Association québécoise des enseignantes et des enseignants du primaire	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://aqep.org/	No
British Columbia Teachers' Federation	MediaSmarts only https://bctf.ca/links.aspx	Yes
Canadian Teachers' Federation	Sparse "resources" (mostly blog posts) but links to MediaSmarts "break the fake" https://www.ctf-fce.ca/categories/educational-resources/	Yes
Manitoba Gov Education Resources Portal	No access without user/pass https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mel/index.html	No
Manitoba Teachers' Society	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/	No
New Brunswick Teachers' Association	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://www.nbta.ca/	No
New Brunswick Teachers' Federation	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://nbtffnb.ca/	No
Newfoundland Government	Provincial "Teaching Digital Citizenship" Guide https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/files/k12_safeandcaring_procedure_5.pdf	Yes
Newfoundland+Labrador Teachers' Association	In-house guides http://www.nlta.nl.ca/resources/ Lists MediaSmarts under "quick links" http://www.nlta.nl.ca/links/	Yes
Northwest Territories Teachers' Association	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://nwtta.nt.ca/	No

Nova Scotia Government Resource Portal	<p>Mostly in-house resources, MediaSmarts “Girl without a face” (bullying) https://www.ednet.ns.ca/digital-online-resources YouTube Channel of PD courses for teachers https://www.youtube.com/c/EECDNS/featured</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant but closed database of videos/ resources • a lot of broken links to resource pages 	Yes
Nunavut Teachers’ Association	<p><u>ONLY lists MediaSmarts</u> http://ntanu.ca/teaching-resources/</p>	Yes
Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers’ Federation	<p>Extensive resource list, but DOES NOT include MediaSmarts https://www.ossf.on.ca/resource-centre/curricular-materials-and-classroom-resources/teaching-resources.aspx</p>	Yes
Ontario Teachers’ Federation	<p>Lessons + Webinars https://www.otffeo.on.ca/en/learning/media-literacy/ Useful Links for media literacy (AML, MediaSmarts, NewsWise/CIVIX/CTRL-F) https://www.otffeo.on.ca/en/resources/useful-links/media-literacy/</p>	Yes
PEI Teachers’ Federation	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://www.peitf.com/	No
Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed	No
Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation	<p><u>US links- CML, IMDB, personal teacher websites-Cybrary Man, Jaime McKenzie</u> <u>Canada- MediaSmarts + NFB only</u> https://www.stf.sk.ca/professional-resources/stewart-resources-centre/resources/related-links/media-studies-media-literacy</p>	Yes
Yukon Teachers’ Association	No Media/ Digital Literacy Resources listed https://www.yta.yk.ca/	No

