

Why critical media literacy should be taught in schools

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When a scholar of critical theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and an award-winning photojournalist and teacher educator collaborate

at UCLA to examine the need for critical media literacy, or CML, in education and beyond, the result is a groundbreaking book.

Douglas Kellner, UCLA distinguished professor of [education](#), and Jeff Share, a faculty adviser and instructor in UCLA's Teacher Education Program, have published brill.com/view/title/55281?lang=en *The Critical Media Literacy Guide—Engaging Media and Transforming Education*, an exploration of the intersection of [media](#), technology and information and the pressing need to teach students from kindergarten to university, how to navigate this environment thoughtfully and with socially just perspectives.

Utilizing print literacy as a focus for [literacy skills](#), Kellner emphasizes the need for other basics in education, including media literacy and computer and [information literacy](#), to better enable students to read and creatively interact with emergent technologies like the internet. Kellner is the author of a comprehensive range of books on social theory, politics, history and culture, including "The American Horror Show: Election 2016 and the Ascendency of Donald J. Trump," and "American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism."

Share has taught in bilingual classrooms at Leo Politi Elementary School in L.A.'s Pico-Union community, and earned his doctorate at UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies in 2006; Kellner was his graduate advisor. Share served as regional coordinator for training at the Center for Media Literacy where he wrote curricula and led professional development. He continues to provide professional development in critical media literacy for LAUSD teachers as well as for educators throughout the United States and internationally. Through Share's collaboration with educators in Argentina, "The Critical Media Literacy Guide" will soon be translated into Spanish.

Kellner and Share had a conversation in which they discussed their book.



Jeff Share, a faculty adviser and instructor in UCLA's Teacher Education Program, left, and Douglas Kellner, UCLA distinguished professor of education. Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

Is this the first book of its kind? Would it be like a handbook?

Share: There are numerous books about media literacy, but I have not seen anything like this about critical media literacy—this is something new.

Kellner: Usually handbooks bring together conventional wisdom and things that people have already said, whereas we're doing ... real critical analysis. I would argue that this is more than a handbook. It's an original, scholarly book.

Share: And it's theory and practice. We really lay out the origins and the frameworks, as well as demonstrating applications of what this looks like in K-12 education, in universities, and even in teacher training.

Kellner: It's concrete and practical. And Jeff gets a lot of credit for this, since he's been training teachers in CML for many years.

Share: A lot of that developed here at UCLA in the critical media [literacy](#) class that we created. We're the only university in the United States that I know of, that has a course like this for teachers.

Kellner: And I can brag that we're one of the only graduate [education] programs that has a cultural studies and CML seminar that has been a requirement of the social sciences and comparative education division.

What are some positive interventions in CML that you've seen in schools and in professional

development for teachers?

Share: We did a research survey recently with former students who had taken the CML class in the last five years and are now teaching. We got back really positive results. Around 80 percent of the teachers who are teaching CML now in their K-12 classes feel that it's improving the critical thinking skills of their students. We are also seeing a lot more adaptation of using different types of technology. Our former students are helping their students think about the impact and the effects of these tools to create different types of messages that will challenge issues that we look at in the classroom in terms of racism, sexism, classism ... the ways that representations in the media are harmful to certain groups and to everybody in general.

Right now, some of my students are teachers in the second year of the Teacher Education Program and several of them, for their masters' inquiry project, are doing CML. I have one student in central Los Angeles, working with third graders and they did all these CML lessons. Then she had the students choose a topic they felt was most important to them, analyze it, and create a piece of media about it. The kids chose school gun violence, the terrorist attack in New Zealand, Islamophobia.

Kellner: It's sad they are aware of guns, or Islamophobia, for that matter. Kids shouldn't have to think about that. But it's good that they are able to analyze these media messages through a critical lens.

Share: They did this in a proactive way and invited guest speakers to the class. Now, a group of these third graders are actually pushing the administration to bring a restorative justice program into their school.

Kellner: Let me add one point here. The innovation that I think came up in general in the field, but particularly in our book in the time we were working on this, is that CML has metamorphized into critical digital

literacies. In other words, we're increasingly aware that the media culture is now part of the bigger digital culture that includes social networks and all of that. When we started out with this, it was film and television that were the dominant media. Now, they're watching TV shows and movies [online]. We're going to do [another] book that delves more into critical digital literacies. That is our next continent to explore.

Share: This is really the marriage of information studies and education. We see what we are doing as this wonderful nexus where the fabulous work that Leah Lievrouw, Safiya Noble, and so many people in information studies have been doing, can now enter into education where it's so needed. And it hasn't been, it's really been missing.

Kellner: More and more, we're trying to get projects together with people in UCLA's Department of Information Studies and maybe even work out a program of critical media and information literacies that will address what are key issues in education and information studies. Both of our fields are connected by technological evolution and developments that have been stunning during our lifetimes.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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