Dynamic Elementary Education: Teaching Digital and Media Literacy

By

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Abstract

The goal of this research study was to investigate the beliefs and practices of a small sample of elementary teachers who effectively instruct their students in the subjects of digital and media literacy. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three TDSB teachers who were identified by their peers for their excellence in teaching the subject area. The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed to generate findings. Findings suggest that digital and media literacy education is important for today's students and can increase student engagement, participation, and achievement. However, participants identified challenges and barriers that suggest a need for additional support in order for teachers to effectively prepare their students for changing and potentially harmful digital and media environments. Overall findings suggest a need for continual development of digital and media educational practices by teachers, researchers, and the educational community at large in order to keep pace with the dynamic nature of digital and media landscapes.

Key Words: media literacy education, digital literacy education, technology education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction: Research Context and Problem

Young people in North America are immersed in a world where media is omnipresent. "Children and adolescents spend more time with media than they do in any other activity except for sleeping—an average of >7 hours/day" (Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2010, p. 757). Within this current highly mediated and technologically informed context, teachers have a duty to teach in a way that authentically responds to the changing needs of their students. Educators in "the digital era" are challenged with the responsibility to teach their young students to "read", produce, and think critically of the media texts that make up so much of their surrounding environments (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015). In order for their students to achieve success in the world of today and tomorrow, they must be given a meaningful opportunity to develop their digital and media literacy skills.

In Ontario, this duty is stated explicitly in the Language Curriculum under the strand of Media Literacy, wherein elementary students are expected to receive the opportunity to develop their media literacy skills by critically consuming and actively producing various forms of media. According to the document: "Skills related to high-tech media such as the Internet, film, and television are particularly important because of the power and pervasive influence these media wield in our lives and in society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006; p. 13).

In contrast to pervasive myths of children as “technological wizards” or “natural cyberkids” there is evidence that shows children need instruction to better use and understand technology and media (Steeves, 2012; Willett, 2007). Despite the aptitude many young people demonstrate when using technology, they still require education in order to use these tools purposefully and meaningfully for learning (Steeves, 2012). It is not enough for educators to
remain passive on the subject and assume that their students are already capable media users and consumers; some professional pedagogical guidance is required.

But, how do educators teach these necessary skills to their students? Media and technology education comes with its own set of challenges. Firstly, there exists no singular approach to media and technology education; methods of instruction are as varied and eclectic as the subject matter itself (Hobbs, 2004; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2008). How can an educator choose the right approach when the possibilities are endless and potentially overwhelming? Secondly, there is an apparent stigma towards children’s use and consumption of media and digital technologies. For example: commonly held beliefs and perceptions that describe kids as being "at risk" from media and technology and the dangers associated with the digital landscape means educators need to take special precautions when incorporating technology into their classrooms (Willett, 2007). With these apparent dangers in mind, parents and administrators may see it more fit to shelter children from the possibility of being exposed to the more troubling aspects of mass media like internet and television. This type of thinking can be attributed to the use of more restrictive policies in schools that ban certain devices and websites in the classroom (Steeves, 2012). Furthermore, preconceived public perceptions of media in the classroom can be negative. The use of video in the classroom, for example, can be associated with stereotypes of lazy teachers pressing the play button on a video player in lieu of actively teaching their students (Hobbs, 2004). Lastly, if technology and media is constantly changing, what chance does education have of staying at the cutting edge? The digital landscape is constantly in flux and it remains a challenge for educators and for education systems as a whole to "keep up" with rapidly evolving technologies and media (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015). How can educators stay ahead of the curve, rather than getting left in the dust?
1.1 Research Purpose

In view of this problem, the goal of my research is to learn some different teachers' approaches to incorporating media and new technologies into their lessons in ways that engage primary and junior students, and to learn from them what observable effects these lessons have on their students' ability to use, understand, and create different digital and media texts. Through this aim, I hope to synthesize my findings in order to begin to develop an effective approach to teaching digital and media literacy in an elementary classroom.

Furthermore, I aim to share these findings with the educational research community in order to further inform instructional support in the strands of digital and media literacy.

This project also aims to raise awareness about the importance and relevance of digital and media literacy today and to provide counter-arguments for some potential misconceptions surrounding the subject. I further intend to inspire teachers and researchers to reflect on their own beliefs and practices related to media education and the use of technology in their classrooms.

1.2 Research Questions

The foundational inquiry guiding my research is the following question: How is a small sample of elementary school teachers designing and implementing lessons that aim to accomplish the curriculum goal of deepening students' digital and media literacy (i.e. their ability to understand, create, and critically interpret media texts) and what outcomes of learning do they observe from their students? Simply put, I want to learn how some educators teach their students digital and media literacy and how their students respond.

Some subsidiary questions to further guide my inquiry are:
● How do a small sample of elementary teachers define digital and media literacy? What does it mean to them?
● What are some of the challenges as well as some of the rewards that a small sample of elementary school teachers find in their instructional approaches to digital and media literacy?
● How do a small sample of elementary teachers assess their students’ digital and media literacy?
● What resources and supports are available to a small sample of elementary teachers to help them implement their digital and media literacy programs?

1.3 Reflexive Positioning Statement

As an avid consumer of print and digital media—a fan of comic books, film, television, and video games since early childhood—I know from my experience that these media have the capacity to be more than just leisure activities. As media texts, they can be sources of information, objects of critical thinking, and great resources for learning. Furthermore, as a hobbyist who has enjoyed creating digital comics, animation, and short films, I know that media creation offers many challenges and rewards for those who undertake it. In 2014 I started a Young Filmmaker's Club at the after-school program where I work and I was inspired by the excitement I saw in the young participants as they frantically tried to work together to make short films during our weekly 60 minute sessions together.

From my own experience, I know working with technology can be daunting because there will inevitably be challenges and "technical difficulties". However, I believe these problems could provide an opportunity for teachers to model effective problem solving strategies with their students as they work together to overcome arising obstacles.
Furthermore, I know that, although I am lucky enough to have experienced the joys and frustrations of digital media production, not everyone has that opportunity. If more teachers were willing to bring technology into their classrooms, more students would have the opportunity to experience what I personally have found so rewarding. In particular, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who may not have the same access to more high-end technological equipment that I have, would gain a chance to use that equipment in a public classroom that does have access to it.

I want to listen to educators working in elementary schools in order to find effective strategies to deliver instruction and manage classrooms where children are given the opportunity and resources to become savvy media creators and critical consumers. Using what I learn from my research I hope to create an effective digital and media literacy program that I can incorporate into my own future classroom.

1.4 Overview

To respond to my research questions, I interview 3 teachers who use technology in their classrooms about their methods and the observable effects of these methods on their students' level of engagement with the material and their capacity to understand, create, and think critically about media. In Chapter 2 I review the literature surrounding digital and media literacy in education. Then, in Chapter 3 I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4 I report on my research findings and their significance. And finally, in Chapter 5 I relate this significance to my own beliefs and practices as an educator, as well as outlining the broader implications and recommendations for the educational research community. I then add some next steps- questions raised, and further domains of inquiry.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review some of the literature on media and digital literacy education and the use of technology in elementary classrooms. First I define digital and media literacy with a focus on how they relate and differ from one another. Next I consider why it is imperative for educators to simultaneously instruct their students in the interrelated subjects of media literacy and digital literacy. Then I review some of the literature pertaining to the observed strengths and weaknesses of students’ levels of digital and media literacy. This leads me to a discussion of how educators might wish to approach integrating technology into their classrooms in order to effectively improve their students’ ability to use, create and understand media texts, as well as some of the benefits and challenges that are involved in teaching the subject matter. Finally, I give an overview of some of the approaches to technology and media education and how they could benefit students’ levels of digital and media literacy.

2.1 Defining Digital and Media Literacy

What do we mean when we talk about digital and media literacy? Though they are closely related, and some may misuse these two terms interchangeably, there is a distinctive difference between them. According to the mediasmarts.ca website, (a valuable resource for teachers interested in incorporating media and digital literacy into their curriculum) media literacy “is a critical engagement with mass media,” while digital literacy “encompasses the personal, technological, and intellectual skills that are needed to live in a digital world” (n.d.). As there is an evident interrelationship between these two concepts I will look at them in this paper as two heads of the same animal. Furthermore, as technologies change, and as our modes of interacting with these technologies continue to change, the line between digital and media...
literacy becomes more difficult to draw. One significant change in the 21st century media landscape has been the development of “prosumers” (a hybrid identity of both consumer and producer) of digital content and media (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015). These “prosumers” blur the line between reading and writing digital media texts and, therefore, highlight the necessary crossover between critically engaging with forms of media and actively participating in them. As this interdependence between digital and media literacy grows we must continue to examine them both in order to see how they can work together to make meaningful learning outcomes.

2.2 The Necessity of Digital and Media Literacy in Education

As the world changes, educational research, policy, and practice must change with it. As technology continues to redefine the world in which young people live and learn, educators have the imperative to stay up to date with technologically relevant pedagogy. The International Reading Association (IRA) expresses this imperative in the following statement made in 2009:

To become fully literate in today’s world, students must become proficient in the new literacies of the 21st-century technologies. As a result, literacy educators have a responsibility to effectively integrate these new technologies into the curriculum, preparing students for the literacy future they deserve (as cited in Hutchison, 2011, p. 312).

In Ontario specifically, media literacy makes up one of the four strands in the Language Curriculum. Ontario teachers are expected to develop their students’ media literacy skills by facilitating them to read, create, and think critically about a range of different media texts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Educators are also challenged to not only provide students with the skills needed to participate in their changing digital landscapes, but also to
provide moral instruction that would encourage them to navigate these digital landscapes with an appropriate ethical framework. In the words of Hoechsmann & DeWaard, “to be digitally literate requires some combination of technological capacities, intellectual competencies and ethical/behavioural comportments” (p. 4, 2015). Assuredly, it is not an easy task to prepare young students for success in a future that, at present, exists only in the realm of science fiction, but this task is an educator’s duty to complete. Teachers must teach their students to be digitally and media literate to prepare them for success in a world that is rapidly changing and being shaped by technological advancements.

2.3 Where Do Children Stand Within the Digital Landscape?

In a young person’s environment, digital and media texts are ubiquitous (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2014; Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2010). Sutherland & Thompson (2001) identify that the perspectives of young children are shaped by (often commercially motivated) media imagery and sounds before they can even read or write (as cited in Jones, 2005). Anecdotally, it is becoming less and less uncommon to see toddlers, and even infants, manipulating touch screen devices on their own. But this high level of exposure and engagement with media and digital technologies does not necessarily mean that young people have the skills to critically understand the media they consume or to effectively use the technology they use in safe and productive ways.

A survey of Canadian teachers found that although teachers identified their students’ facility to use online tools, they were not using them effectively for learning (Steeves, 2012). One prevalent problem that teachers noticed was their students’ inability to properly assess the validity of online content; students often regarded what they found online as factual regardless of its dubious nature (Steeves, 2012). This suggests that an important teaching goal for an
elementary educator would be to provide their students with the critical skills necessary to challenge and evaluate different online sources of information.

Even though students have increased access to resources that allow them to be active creators rather than passive consumers, this does not mean that they are taking full advantage of the increasing amount of opportunities to be creative. A survey of Canadian students found YouTube to be the most popular website overall, however, only a minority of student users actually used it as a platform to create content; only one third of students had submitted a video they had created themselves and less than five percent of students did so on an ongoing basis (Steeves, 2014). This data suggests that students require guidance and encouragement in order to adopt a more creative role in their online activities. If students are instructed to use technology creatively, they would have an opportunity to develop their digital literacy skills and, by extension, enhance their media literacy skills.

Rebekah Willett (2007) uses a case study of children learning how to design video games to look at pedagogical approaches to digital production and acquiring media literacy skills. Though she does not reach any definite conclusions, she identifies two disparate camps of thought on children and media; on the one hand, there is the view that children are “at risk” of inherent dangers associated with media (and therefore require careful instruction), and on the other hand there is the view of children as “natural cyberkids” who learn easily through only immersion in a form of digital media (and therefore require no careful instruction). Educators should think critically about both sides of this perceived spectrum in order to create a balanced and relevant digital and media literacy program.
Regardless of where they see their students’ place within the digital landscape, educators can recognize areas of growth where they can facilitate the improvement of their students’ digital and media literacy skills.

2.4 New Learning for New Contexts

So how might educators help their students build their digital and media literacy skills? Though there are curricular imperatives to teach digital and media literacy—and Canada is an exemplar for media education policy when compared to the rest of the world—the eclectic and varied nature of media literacy instruction means that there is a wide range of educational approaches and outcomes to the subject (Hobbs, 2004; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2008). In the subsections below I offer some suggestions on how to teach digital and media literacy in an effective manner, based on recent research.

2.4.1 Putting students first

One teacher, Danika Barker, who the Ontario College of Teachers identifies as an exemplary model for using technology in her classroom, has the following advice for educators: “Don’t make the mistake of implementing 21st-century teaching tools while hanging on to 19th-century teacher-centric pedagogy [...] Let the students lead a little” (Blackwell, 2012, p. 36). As this advice indicates, it’s not enough to simply add elements of technology and media into the classroom; an educator cannot just change what they teach, they must also change how they teach. A survey of Canadian teachers agreed with Danika Barker’s sentiment as they expressed that the “drill and kill” type of teacher who “typically talks at students from the front of the room” would have great difficulty integrating technology into their classroom because it would cause them to lose a level of control over what their students were doing (Steeves, 2012, p. 11). Technology integration seems to work more effectively from a student-centred approach with
educators who assume the role of the “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage” (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2012). One elementary teacher put it in the following words: “I think my role has shifted more from … I don’t know, for lack of a better word, like on a stage … to almost more of a facilitator of learning experiences in my classroom. Everything isn’t as teacher directed; I think things have become more student-directed” (Steeves, 2012, p. 11-12). Jones (2005) agrees that teachers are more effective media educators when they allow their students to provide the source for the media content that they study. Teachers also noticed that, with this more student-centred approach to pedagogy, they had more opportunities to learn from their students, which for their students was a great source of pride (Steeves, 2012).

Hoechsmann & DeWaard (2015) advocate for teachers to become model learners alongside their students when teaching digital and media literacy citing Siemens & Tittenberger’s (2009) notion of “curatorial learning” as an effective practice. According to Siemens & Tittenberger, “A curator is an expert learner. Instead of dispensing knowledge, [s/he] creates spaces in which knowledge can be created, explored, and connected” (as cited in Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015, p. 45). The teacher as curator model serves as one option for an apparent need to change to a more student-driven pedagogical approach to digital and media literacy instruction.

2.4.2 Fostering a framework of student inquiry

Adding to this idea of a student-driven approach to media and digital literacy is the idea of using a framework of inquiry to “promote healthy skepticism rather than cynicism,” which means prompting the students to ask questions rather than giving them all the answers (Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p. 24). In this approach, students would be encouraged to develop their own inquiries about the media issues that they find important and relevant. Further emphasizing the
imperative to make media education student-centred, Thoman & Jolls write: “To ignore the media-rich environment [students] bring with them to school is to shortchange them for life” (2004, p.20).

In order to facilitate student inquiry, Thoman & Jolls provide five key questions from the Centre for Media Literacy (2003):

1. Who created the message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently from me?
4. What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in -or omitted from- this message?
5. Why is this message being sent? (as cited in Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p. 25-27)

These questions (or versions of these questions that are worded in an age-appropriate manner) can be modelled for the students, but students should also be encouraged to come up with questions of their own in order to develop their critical thinking skills in relation to media texts and the digital landscape. As Hoechsmann & DeWaard put it in their own words, “Learning in today’s digitally enriched learning spaces is an active, inquiry based process” (2015, p. 33).

2.4.3 Integrating media and technology for more meaningful instruction

According to the same surveyed Canadian teachers, they found it more fruitful to teach their students why using technology could help them learn rather than teaching them how to use different kinds of technology (Steeves, 2014). One teacher viewed the latter approach to technological/media education as a way of “shoehorning” technology into the classroom and advocated making instruction more meaningful by applying the technology to other aspects of
learning. Instead of using technology as a substitute within the framework of teaching more traditional lessons, the technology was effectively redefining the way the lessons were taught.

Jones (2005) also points out that even though it is not an explicit requirement in the Ontario curriculum outside of the Language document, many subjects have a communication, knowledge/skill category that could provide opportunity for cross-curricular media integration.

### 2.4.4 The link between media production and media literacy

Combining media literacy instruction with digital literacy instruction seems the most effective way to improve skills in both areas as increased proficiency in one area can benefit proficiency in the other (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2008; Jones, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006; Rogow, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). “At its best, media literacy education is nonpartisan and includes production (i.e., the ability to “write”) as well as analysis (the ability to “read”)” (Rogow, 2004, p.32). This sentiment is further reflected by Jones (2005) who writes about the relationship between creating a media text and thinking critically about that particular media form:

When students are given the responsibility to produce video, they often look purposefully for techniques used in professional or student movies to determine how and why these techniques are used so they can use them in their own videos. They see the medium through a new perspective and often have a better understanding of how form and content intertwine (p. 14).

When students are given the opportunity to create media, they can examine it from the perspective of a creator, from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. They can ask the five key questions (above) of their own work while they are in the process creating it.
By providing a balance of media consumption and media production, educators can
depthen their students’ understanding of various media forms and improve their digital and media
literacy skills.

2.5 Some Benefits for Educators

If educators effectively incorporate technology into their curriculum for the purposes of
developing students digital and media literacy skills, they can expect to find a range of benefits.
The most notable positive outcome within high-tech classrooms is increased student engagement
(Blackwell, 2012; Jones, 2005; Scheibe, 2004; Steeves, 2012; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Many
students are excited to use tablets, computers, cameras, and the like which have a certain “wow
factor” when compared to more traditional pencil and paper classroom instruments. Increased
student engagement and motivation is an essential upside for teachers who want to enrich their
programming with media and technology.

An effective digital and media literacy program can help students build on other skills
and offers an increased opportunity for collaboration. Thoman & Jolls (2004) state:

Activities that involve creating media messages -such as writing and producing a video
script complete with sound effects- not only create proficiency in writing and editing
(core language arts goals) but also build teamwork skills, tolerance for another’s
perspective, organization and delegation skills and an appreciation for the variety of
talents it takes to complete a large-scale project (p.20).

The skills developed through digital and media literacy instruction are applicable to many areas
of the curriculum and reinforce critical thinking skills which are relevant to countless areas of
life. Furthermore, using networking technologies to build an online classroom community would
allow extra opportunities for collaborative learning to occur between students outside of school.
Research also shows some ways that technology can be used to enhance teaching practices and accommodate students with special needs (Hutchison, 2015; McEwan, 2014; Schneps, Thomson, Chen, Sonnert & Pomplun, 2013; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011). By building students specific digital literacy skills, they could then become resources in the classroom to aid educators in implementing assistive technologies for their fellow classmates.

Finally, the level of using digital technologies in the classroom can increase student accountability. For example, when extending readers theatre to podcasting, researchers noticed that “having a wider audience” and “the permanency of the work” caused students to take the task more seriously than they would if it had been a live demonstration to the class (Vasinda & McLeod, 2011, p. 493).

These are only some of the benefits of an effective digital and media literacy program within an elementary classroom. My research adds to and expands on what has been included in this section.

2.6 Some Challenges for Educators

Even though this paper strongly supports the use of technology within elementary classrooms to develop students’ practical life skills, it should not be misunderstood that technology is some magic trick that will turn every classroom into a utopian learning environment. To teach digital and media literacy effectively, educators must tackle and overcome many challenges.

Firstly, although technology in the classroom can cause increased student engagement it also has the capacity to be disruptive. Strong classroom management skills are necessary to maintain a professional degree of order amongst excited, tech-wielding students (Steeves, 2012).
Secondly, teaching with technology requires a certain level of digital and media fluency on the part of the teacher, and many teachers feel like they lack the proper skills and training necessary (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2012). Furthermore, there is little support offered for ways technology can be taught to students. While some Canadian teachers did have access to some tech training courses, these courses focused more on how to use a particular piece of software rather than how to use technology to enhance learning (Steeves, 2012).

There is a perceived mistrust of media education expressed in the following words of Faith Rogow:

Too often those who oppose media technologies in the classroom lament that teachers use television as a babysitter or computers as a reward. But few administrators or education schools have ever provided preservice or in-service training that would help teachers learn to do anything else” (2004, p.32).

However, there is a seeming lack of research to back up her claims. One can imagine a chorus of complaints from certain parents objecting to more “screen time” in the classroom, and using video games, computers, movies, and television to teach elementary students, however I was unable to find any research that demonstrated parental views on digital and media literacy instruction.

Educators may also have to struggle to abide by laws that surround digital and media literacy. Canadian copyright law is in the reformative process of adapting to the needs of the education system, but educators must be wary of what they legally can and cannot do within a “high tech classroom” (Nenych, 2011).
In addition to legal considerations, an educator must take moral considerations when instructing digital and media literacy. The digital landscape grants children access to a new “cyberspace” wherein they must make moral and ethical decisions. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to offer moral guidance as part of their digital and media literacy instruction (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015).

These are only some of the benefits and challenges of an effective digital and media literacy program within an elementary classroom. My research adds to and expands on what has been included in this section.

2.7 Conclusion

Digital literacy and media literacy are distinct from one another, but they are interrelated. Therefore, we may be able to teach and understand them by examining them together rather than separately. It is imperative for students to develop their digital and media literacy in order to live successfully in a changing world (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Steeves, 2012). While children and youth often engage with technology and media, they need to be educated in order to make this engagement safe, meaningful, and productive. But simply changing the content of what we teach in classrooms is not enough; it is recommended that teachers adopt a more student-centred inquiry approach that integrates digital and media literacy into other content areas and gives students opportunities to both analyze and create digital and media texts. Some benefits of this kind of effective digital and media literacy education are increased student engagement and collaboration, more accommodating classrooms, and increased student accountability. However, with these benefits come many challenges. In the chapters that follow, I examine how experienced educators tackle these issues in their beliefs and in their practice. My research adds to the literature on digital and media literacy education by providing a platform for
some of the voices of experienced practicing teachers who have been identified as effective
digital and media literacy educators by their peers. Their discussion and reflections on the issues
raised in this chapter will provide a real-world context to the discourse, which could help
members of the educational community frame their understanding of what it means to teach
digital and media literacy to elementary students. In the next chapter, I describe and justify the
research methodology chosen for this research paper.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology. I identify the decisions I have made in my research methodology and provide reasoning for my choices with regards to the purpose and goals of my research. I begin by clarifying my research approach, procedures, and instruments of data collection, and then I shift the discussion to my research participants, identifying who they are and why I have chosen them based upon my sampling criteria. I explain the process of data analysis and discuss the ethical considerations and procedures necessary to carry out this research. Finally, I consider the strengths and shortcomings of the research methodology before I conclude with a concise summary and rationale of the major methodological decisions I have made for my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach that includes a review of existing literature pertaining to the research purpose and questions, as well as a semi-structured interview with three teachers.

Yin (2006, p. 7-8) identifies the following five features of a qualitative research approach:

1. Studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real-world conditions;
2. Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study;
3. Covering the contextual conditions within which people live;
4. Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior; and
5. Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

As this research aims to find out how a small sample of Ontario educators teach digital and media literacy, it benefits by exploring the question within the real-world context of the classroom experiences of practicing teachers. It further benefits from extracting the views and perspectives articulated by classroom teachers who are faced with the task of equipping their students with digital/media literacy skills. Qualitative research can be an effective tool for finding causal explanations in education because it looks deeply at causal processes within the context which they operate (Maxwell, 2012). With a qualitative research approach that covers the contextual conditions of an education setting, I have found some specific teaching practices that cause positive learning outcomes for digital and media literacy students. Also, by using multiple sources of evidence (three different participants) I have somewhat assessed the diverse landscape of media education in Canada, which Hoechsmann & Poyntz, (2008) characterize as “eclectic” in nature.

Furthermore, Johnson (1995) proposes that technology educators deepen their research focus past a quantitative examination of superficial data and features; he identifies qualitative methodologies as powerful means of furthering our understanding of pedagogy and learning, and notes that they have become more accepted and legitimized “in recent years” (as cited in Hoepfl, 1997, p. 47).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for collecting data in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. The general protocol of semi-structured interviews involves asking a set of predetermined open-ended questions, while maintaining an allowance that other questions may
arise during the dialogue between interviewer and participant (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006). This format is advantageous because it allows the participants, who can draw from their wealth of experience in digital and media literacy instruction, to move the conversation to areas unforeseen by the (relatively inexperienced) interviewer. I was prepared to deviate from the predetermined script of questions in order to allow access to potentially meaningful data that arose from the participants’ specific areas of expertise (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006). While conducting semi-formal interviews in groups would offer the advantage of eliciting a wider range of interviewee responses, I conducted one-on-one interviews in order to investigate more deeply into each participant’s personal experience (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006). This individual approach to in-depth interviews allowed me to uncover and compare each participant’s specific and personalized approach to digital and media literacy instruction, which speaks to the diversity of pedagogical approaches to the subject matter.

I organized my interview protocol (Appendix B) around five sections, starting with questions pertaining to the participants professional background and experience, followed by a section on their perspectives and beliefs regarding digital and media literacy education, then I asked about their specific instructional practices and strategies before concluding the interview with a discussion of some of the supports and challenges as well as next steps for teachers who want to make digital and media literacy a key component of their pedagogy.

3.3 Participants

The units of data collection (in this case the research participants) “need to be an appropriate reflection of the main topic of study” (Yin, 2011, p. 83). Interviewees in qualitative research studies should share specific, critical commonalities related to the purpose of the research (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006). Here I review the sampling criteria I have
established for my research participants, and why these criteria exist for the purpose and questions of my research. I also consider my methods of participant recruitment and my rationale for using them. Also included is a section that details brief personal bios for each participant.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria was applied to teacher participants:

1. Teachers have five or more years teaching experience.
2. Teachers have taught in an Ontario elementary classroom since 2006.
3. Teachers have extensive experience integrating meaningful digital and media literacy instruction into their lesson planning.
4. Collectively, teachers have experience teaching a range of elementary grade levels.
5. Collectively, teachers have experience teaching in different schools.

In order to respond to the research question, “How are a small sample of elementary school teachers designing and implementing lessons that aim to accomplish the curriculum goal of deepening students’ digital and media literacy and what outcomes of learning do they observe from their students?” I required that each of my teacher participants had extensive experience teaching the subject matter in a meaningful way. It is not enough for my participants to use technology in their classrooms, they needed to actively practice teaching digital and media literacy to their students. Furthermore, I required each participant to have a minimum of five years teaching experience so that they could provide informed commentary on how digital/media education has or has not changed in recent years. I additionally required teachers who are currently teaching or have taught since 2006 so that I could investigate how they interpret and design lessons based off of the 2006 Ontario Language Curriculum document, which identifies
Media literacy as one of the four strands of Language education. Collectively, I required my teacher participants to have taught a range of grade levels and in a range of school settings so that I could get a broader understanding of how digital and media literacy is taught in different school settings to different student grades.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

Yin (2006) identifies and defines four methods of sampling in qualitative research: purposive, convenience, snowball, and random sampling. Purposive sampling is preferred and differs from the other kinds of sampling because participants are chosen in a deliberate and thoughtful manner (Yin, 2006). By contrast, convenience sampling refers to selecting participants just on the basis of their availability, and is not preferred, because it is likely to lead to “an unknown degree of incompleteness” and “an unwanted degree of bias” in the data that is collected (Yin, 2006, p. 88). Snowball sampling occurs when existing data collection units (i.e. participants) lead researchers to new ones, so it can fall under either category of purposive or convenience sampling (Yin, 2006). Lastly, random sampling, which is rare in qualitative research, occurs when the researcher selects a “statistically defined sample” of participants from a “known population” of participants (Yin, 2006, p. 89).

For the purposes of this research, I primarily used a purposive sampling procedure in order to find participants who would offer fruitful discussion on the topic of digital and media literacy education, based on their fulfillment of the sampling criteria. However, I did permit snowball sampling that was purposeful when one teacher I knew identified two colleagues who fit my sampling criteria.

3.3.3 Participant bios
All three participants are elementary teachers who, at the time of their interviews, were working in TDSB schools. They all had more than fifteen years of teaching experience across a range of grades and subjects. They were selected primarily for their experience teaching digital and media literacy in elementary classrooms.

Tim has been teaching for almost seventeen years at the TDSB. He was an elementary classroom teacher in a Grade 2 and Grade 3 classroom and a physical education teacher before working full time in his school’s media lab. At the time of his interview he was working as a support teacher delivering digital and media literacy lessons to Grade 2-5 classes. He was well recommended by his peers for the work he did.

Laura has been teaching at the TDSB for twenty years. She has taught all subjects from kindergarten to Grade 6 and at the time of her interview she was teaching ESL, media literacy, and drama. As a prep delivery teacher, she taught these subjects to classes of children ranging from kindergarten to Grade 5. She was also well recommended by her peers for the work she did.

Marla has been teaching at the TDSB for seventeen years. During this time, she has taught in Grades 1 to 5 classrooms, as an ESL teacher, as a librarian, and as an IT (digital literacy) instructor. At the time of the interview she was working as an elementary teacher in a Grade 1 classroom. The year previous, she had been the school librarian and was responsible for teaching digital literacy skills to Grade 1 to 5 classes. She too was recommended by her peers.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative research generally uses an inductive means of analysis (Yin 2006). In order for this data analysis to be effective it must be rigorous, and Yin (2006) outlines the following three precautions researchers must take to maintain rigour: assessing and reassessing data accuracy, being thorough rather than taking shortcuts in the analysis process, and recognizing
researcher bias throughout data analysis. In qualitative research, data analysis is ongoing, taking place during the earlier stages of data collection as well as after (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006; Yin 2006). As a researcher, I had to be critical, thorough, and self-conscious throughout all stages of data analysis.

Data analysis occurs non-linearly across five phases: compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting, and concluding (Yin, 2006). Data from the research interviews was compiled, arranged and rearranged, and coded, while it was interpreted and conclusions were drawn from these interpretations. In addition to looking for meaning in the thematic similarities and differences found in the data, I also looked at some null data in the research for significance.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006, p. 319) identify the following four ethical issues concerning qualitative research interviews: “1) reducing the risk of unintended harm 2) protecting the interviewee’s information 3) effectively informing the interviewees about the nature of the study, and 4) reducing the risk of exploitation”.

Given the nature of my topic of study there was very little risk of causing any unintended harm to my participants; I did not foresee a discussion of digital and media literacy education to uncover any traumatic or emotionally harmful memories for teachers. However, participants were granted the right to withdraw from the interview at any time and to refuse to answer any question posed. To protect my participants’ information, I have referred to them by pseudonyms and did not disclose any personally identifying features. Data was stored on a private, password protected hard-drive to be erased after five years. Interviewees were informed beforehand about the purpose and nature of my study with a brief summary and a consent form (Appendix A). To
reduce the risk of exploitation, participants also were given the opportunity to review and alter any data they have contributed before publication.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the “human instrument” of data collection and analysis (Hoepfl, 1997; Yin 2006). While it lacks the scientific objectivity of a quantitative approach, “qualitative inquiry accepts the complex and dynamic quality of the social world” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 48). The distinctly human and social element of this approach can be seen as a weakness, but also as a strength. Since my research focuses on the social setting of the education system, it is beneficial to acknowledge and draw upon the beliefs, values, and social dynamics of its real-world context. Furthermore, to quote Maxwell (2012, p.655) “educational research desperately needs qualitative approaches and methods if it is to make valid and useful claims about what works.” Since a goal of my research is to inform myself and the educational community about effective teaching in the area of digital and media literacy, a qualitative approach has helped to allow me to do so in a way that is theoretically “valid” and “useful”.

One specific limitation in my research is a lack of approval to include parents, students, and administrators as interview participants. An examination of parental, student, and administrative values, attitudes, and beliefs on digital and media literacy education could more deeply contextualize the research problem. However, this limitation has allowed my research to focus more on the teacher’s side of the matter, and may therefore make it more accessible and relevant to educators.

Lastly, there was a challenge in making meaningful and generalizable conclusions from such a small sample of data. Only interviewing three teacher participants hardly begins to do justice to the vast range of diverse pedagogical approaches to digital and media literacy in
Canada. The strength of such a small sample size, however, is that it has allowed each participant's specific context and approach to be analyzed in more depth.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the research methodology. I briefly defined the qualitative research approach that I used and why this approach is preferable (rather than a quantitative research approach) in attempting to find significance within the real world social context of my participants’ classroom experience. I expressed the benefit of a semi-structured interview process which allows enough openness for the participant to take the conversation to topics unforeseen by the less experienced interviewer. I then outlined my sampling criteria and purposive and snowball sampling procedure and reasoned why they were necessary in order to attempt to elicit the most fruitful data for my research inquiry. I briefly introduced my participants with short biographies containing pertinent information. Then I explained the rigour I used in how I analyzed my data and the care I used in protecting the identity and integrity of my participants. I also discussed some of the limitations and strengths of my methodology; by only examining data from three teacher-participants, I was able to look at the issue with more depth and focus than I would have if I had done a broader study. In the next chapter, I report on my research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings that developed from the data analysis of my research interviews with three TDSB teachers. These findings respond to the research question: how do a small sample of elementary teachers approach digital and media literacy education, and what learning outcomes do they observe in their students? First, this chapter looks at teacher beliefs around digital and media literacy education. I discuss how participants’ views on the ubiquity and potential dangers of their students’ digital and commercial media environments motivated them to teach digital and media literacy to inform, protect, and raise the critical awareness of their learners. Second, this chapter explores how the participants’ more teacher-directed approaches to digital and media literacy education provide contrast for the more student-centred practices championed in the relevant literature. I also compare the different participant stances on integrative versus segregative approaches to digital and media literacy. Then I discuss how participants noticed increased student engagement, participation and academic achievement when implementing digital and media literacy education, yet still warned of the potential risk for students to become disengaged or misuse technology or media in the classroom. Participants also expressed keeping up to date, technological dependency, and technological failures as potential struggles for digital and media literacy educators. That is followed up with a brief examination of the areas of support and areas of need that participants identified, which were essential to the implementation of their digital and media literacy programs. Lastly, I conclude with a summary of my findings and some recommendations for next steps.
4.1 Participants Acknowledged That Digital and Media Literacy Education Was Essential for Their Students to Ensure Success in Their Inevitable Immersion in Digital and Media Environments.

Teachers addressed the ubiquity of digital information and technology as well as media in the lives of their young students. They recognized dangers present in the changing worlds of their students and expressed preparing their students for success in these dynamic worlds as an overall goal of their digital and media literacy education programs. They all identified critical awareness as an integral goal for the students in their digital and media literacy programs.

4.1.1 Participants recognized the ubiquity of media texts and digital environments in their students’ lives as a catalyst for digital and media literacy education.

Participants identified mass media and digital devices and environments as an inevitable and significant part of their students’ worlds. Laura was quick to point out the ubiquity of mass media, not only in her students’ lives, but in everyone’s lives. She stated: “Media is, first of all, it’s everywhere.” Marla mentioned noticing the pervasiveness of technology and media even with very young children. She mused: “Oh, they’re exposed to tablets and computers at such an early age. I mean, I’ve seen two-year-olds playing with their parents’ phones. Right? The exposure happens at a younger and younger age, I guess.” Marla expressed a belief that early intervention with digital literacy instruction could go a long way in ensuring the future success of students. She advised: “The sooner you talk to children and make them informed about things at an earlier age, the better prepared they will be for things in the future.”

Tim also recognized the pervasiveness of digital- and media-related issues in his students lives as motivation for digital and media literacy education. Defining digital literacy as “a way of understanding and reading how technology is affecting how we communicate” he then described
digital environments such as Facebook and Snapchat as “essential”. He also commented on the changing landscape of his students’ accessibility to internet and wireless devices: “I mean, years ago, I said, ‘How many people have internet?’ and it would be half the class. Nowadays, every single person has internet, so, I mean, that's not an issue.” Tim outlined his reasoning for teaching digital literacy as follows: “this is our next generation and they're gonna have these tools in their hand and they're gonna be using it every day.”

All participants saw media and digital technology as a pervasive part of their students’ lives and were motivated to teach their students to better understand it. This understanding of the importance of media literacy reflects the research literature studied in chapter 2, which posits that the ubiquity of digital and media texts and landscapes in contemporary society drive the need for effective digital and media literacy education (Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2014; Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2010).

4.1.2 Participants identified threats and safety concerns associated with media texts and digital technology, which motivated them to teach digital and media literacy.

Interview participants emphasized student vulnerability as motivation for teaching digital and media literacy. Marla characterized digital environments as potentially dangerous places for children and expressed a need to protect kids from online threats. She stated:

It’s also- the safety, y’know, around [being online] too, like, y’know parents need to be, I guess, more vigilant, making sure that there are those safety blocks in place. But, kids also need to know, y’know, if you touch something accidentally and something pops up, what do you do? So, there’s that safety component there too.

She went on to warn, “It's very easy to find [...] yourself in a lot of trouble” and cited online bullying and “victimization” as common online threats. Laura expressed her own trepidations
towards technology and wireless communications and their effects on “screenagers” by recounting her personal dilemma of whether or not to let her Grade 7 daughter have a cell phone. Similarly, Tim tells of his own hesitation to allow his daughter to use the popular app Snapchat. In his words,

You want to protect them from the evils of technology, but you also want to allow them to become part of their social group. By denying them the access to certain apps—like, for example, my daughter just got Snapchat and I thought about it and I said, ‘Well, there's some things on there that I don't like.’ But then if I deny her then she's out of the conversation of all her friends at school.

Tim and Laura’s similar family dilemmas suggest an underlying need to protect or shelter their own children from threats associated with these digital landscapes, a sentiment reflected in research literature that classifies kids as being “at risk” in digital environments (Willett, 2007).

In terms of media literacy, participants also expressed a desire to protect their students from misinformation, media “tricks” and “weasel words” (false or questionable representations and language used in media to persuade its audience). Laura and Tim both discussed how media sometimes “targets” students and can have harmful effects. Laura connected this desire to her own students by expressing the following: “in our school I can tell you that even, even in this school there are kids that are very sensitive to how media is presented in terms of, y’know, background and ethnic background and where they come from”. Laura also mentioned harmful messages concerning gender identity as a media issue to address in her teaching.

Participants’ identification of threats and a need to protect students from digital and media related harms could have motivated their teaching of digital and media literacy. It also
could be connected to their goal to increase student awareness and critical thinking, which is discussed in the next section.

4.1.3 Participants identified increasing their students’ critical awareness of the nature of digital and media landscapes as a goal of their digital and media literacy programs.

All participants expressed a similar goal to increase and deepen student awareness and understanding of the media texts and digital environments that surround them. Tim highlighted teaching students the permanent nature of online digital texts as one specific goal of his digital and media literacy program. He expressed the importance of making students aware of their “digital footprint” in the following quote:

Maybe they'll reach a point in their life where, “I can't undo what happened. I can't undo those pictures I posted. I can't undo those messages I sent. I can't undo it.” And it happens a lot with politics, and you see it popping up with people that become famous. And, I think that affects everyday people nowadays, right? So, we really have to be aware—try to educate children at a young age that whatever you post, whatever you write is there forever. And there's always a way to track what you said. There's always a way to pull up a picture that you post.

Tim cited his wife, who is a small business owner, and her practice of checking the Facebook profiles of potential employees as a real life example of the importance of making his students aware of their permanent digital legacy. He also went on to speak about his goal of increasing student awareness of the implicit messages that commercial media texts communicate to their audience. He articulates this goal as follows:

We need to be aware of strategies that they use, the misinformation, the "weasel words" we call it, uh, y'know... Does "New and Improved" really mean anything? Does it say
“Washes ten times better” mean anything? So, we're talking about media literacy. It's like, how are we going to be aware of these messages? What are the truths? How are we going to analyze? How are we going to evaluate? What's the—what's the message? What's the hidden message?

Marla also mentioned critical reading of digital and media texts as a goal for the students in her media literacy program. She asserted: “[Scepticism] doesn't hurt. It doesn't mean that everything out there is false, but you need to really be sure that what you were saying is true, so definitely, y'know, you hope that it is developing their critical thinking skills”. Laura explicitly cited the Ontario curriculum when she articulated her goal of fostering her students’ critical thinking about media texts.

The participants’ expressed desire to prepare their students for critical awareness and ethical engagement in changing digital and media landscapes relates to Hoechsmann and DeWaard’s (2015) impetus to create responsible “digital citizens”.

4.2 Participants Described Teacher-Directed Instructional Approaches to Media Literacy and Gave Reasons for Teaching Digital and Media Literacy Separately.

Participants expressed giving students a degree of choice within their digital and media literacy programs, but described their practices as largely teacher-directed. According to their accounts, students had some choice over what content they studied, but had little input in the design of their instruction. Participants also identified reasons to teach digital and media literacy separately rather than concurrently, however they all agreed that both digital and media literacy could be integrated into other areas of the curriculum.

4.2.1 Participants outlined approaches to digital and media literacy education that gave students a degree of choice, yet were still largely teacher directed.
While research suggests that effective digital and media literacy education should embody a more student-centred approach, (Blackwell, 2012; Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2012) participants detailed instructional approaches that were more teacher-centred. While participants mentioned giving their students some agency and choice over the content covered, they described educational approaches wherein they were the ones designing and implementing the lessons. Tim explained his process of going through the curriculum and discovering and implementing his own units, while still giving his students some choice on topics that are meaningful and relevant to his student’s experiences. He mentioned telling his students: “You need to teach me about the things that are current in Media and I need to teach you about how to read it, understand it, and how to create it.” In a similar vein, Laura recounted directing classroom discussions where she allowed students to contribute and bring forth topics that are meaningful for them. She also shared an example of a culminating activity that she designed for her students wherein they came up with a product and a pitch to perform in the style of the popular television show, Dragon’s Den. Again, students had some choice in what their product would be and how they would pitch it, but the overall design of the assignment was created by the teacher. Marla also described an instructional approach wherein she, rather than her students, generated the assignments. However, she did recognize the value of students bringing some of their own experiences to their work in the following statement:

You'll find they love to share. So, they will just start talking about, y'know, the toy that broke on them the second day they brought it home [...] I think the more they can connect with it, the more engaged they'll be, the more they'll want to share, the more, hopefully, they'll think about what's happening.
In terms of assessment, Tim disclosed that he “usually” co-creates success criteria with his students and “sometimes” lets them do peer evaluations, though he followed that up with a warning that friends might dishonestly give each other an undeserved good mark. Neither Laura nor Marla mentioned student involvement in assessment within their digital and media literacy programs, though absence of evidence does not equal evidence of absence.

Overall, participants cited examples of media literacy assignments and activities that were mostly teacher-directed. This suggests some hesitation to adopt the more heavily student-centred approach to digital and media literacy education suggested in some of the related literature (Blackwell, 2012; Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Steeves, 2012). Tim emphasized the importance of a “[classroom] environment that is controlled” which could explain in part why he does not cede absolute control to his young students. Steeves (2012) similarly highlights a teacher’s sense of classroom control as a barrier to adopting more student-centred practices in digital and media literacy education. Comparing these participants’ instructional approaches to ones that are more heavily student-centred could be a fruitful domain for further research.

4.2.2 Although participants recognized digital and media literacy to be interrelated, they gave justifications for teaching them sometimes separately rather than always concurrently.

All participants recognized a connection between digital and media literacy yet they also all gave reasons why the two topics should be taught separately. These assertions contrast a strong sentiment within the research literature on the increased efficacy of combining digital and media literacy education (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2008; Jones, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006; Rogow, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004).
Tim recognized a connection between digital and media literacy, but not always an interdependence; he asserted:

Well, you can have media literacy without technology. There's a lot of media literacy that can be paper—it could be a sign, it could be somebody walking down the street yelling. Uh, digital literacy, I think, comes from the digital world—from technology. And the two intertwine, because now, they see, as a lot of people do, they see—see, uh, technology as a tool for—for getting their message across.

Despite this assertion, Tim gave a range of examples of lessons and creative activities that he implemented that developed both his students digital and media literacy skills simultaneously; they were not only reading and understanding text, they were using digital tools to build their own. Laura, on the other hand, advocated for a chronological approach to digital and media literacy instruction wherein students are first taught how media forms operate before they can use digital technologies to create texts of their own. She reasoned:

Of course there is a connection [between digital and media literacy]. [...] However, I think that before you start to expose those layers and give them, "Okay, go make a film." "Go make a short video." Let's not. Let's just really understand what it is made of, y'know. What is the recipe?

Marla also promoted teaching digital literacy skills sometimes separately from media literacy because it allowed her to focus her instruction and assessment. She justified her thinking with the following example: “Yeah, things are connected [...] but there are times where I would like to know that all twenty of them can type their name, y'know?”
These practical reasons for teaching digital and media literacy separately at times suggest that integrating these two related topics may not be the “only” or “best” instructional approach for practicing teachers, despite what much of the research suggests.

4.2.3 Participants agreed that digital and media literacy instruction could be integrated into other curricular areas.

Every participant mentioned incorporating other strands of the Language curriculum into their media literacy instruction. Tim reported that this crossover of Language strands was not difficult because “a lot of it is overlapping anyways.” Laura remarked often using drama, her personal area of strength as an educator, to develop her students’ media literacy skills. Like Jones (2015) who claims media can be integrated into any Ontario curricular subject, Tim and Laura both expressed a belief that any subject could be taught alongside digital and media literacy, however they did not provide examples from their personal practice.

4.3 Participants Identified Challenges and Benefits Related to Student Engagement, Accountability, Proper Use, and Relevance Within the Dynamic Field of Digital and Media Literacy Education.

All participants identified heightened levels of student engagement as a benefit in their digital and media literacy programs and linked this benefit to improved academic success. Inversely, participants also noted the potential for students to become distracted and disengaged from meaningful study when using or examining digital tools and media texts. Participants also recognized overdependence on technology and unreliability of technology as two potential pitfalls to teaching with technology and media.

4.3.1 Participants observed increased student engagement and accountability to be assets in digital and media literacy instruction leading to improved academic achievement.
Participants echoed the literature which highlights student engagement as a principal benefit in digital and media education (Blackwell, 2012; Jones, 2005; Scheibe, 2004; Steeves, 2012; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Marla, Laura, and Tim all reported observing increased student engagement when delivering digital and media literacy lessons. On how his students respond to his media literacy instruction, Tim asserted: “Well, if you ask them what their favourite classes are, it's Gym and Media, right?” He then championed his program for successfully engaging and providing opportunities for academic success to struggling behavioural students in the following statement:

And I find that there's some—there's some kids in my class that in other classes, may be behavioural or give the teacher a hard time. And when they're engaged with the computer, I find that they can be leaders. They can be helpful. Uh, they're focused and they can create things that are just, uh, amazing. And the teacher is sometimes surprised that this is coming from that student.

Participants asserted that topics in media and digital literacy were “meaningful” or “relevant” to their students’ lives and found that student performance increased in these subject areas. Tim explained this phenomenon by simply stating: “they'll do a much better job if they care about what they're writing and they're passionate about what they're learning”.

Marla shared a personal anecdote about an autistic child in her classroom who demonstrated an understanding of number sense previously thought to be beyond him thanks to assistive technology. She recounts the surprise she felt at the time:

Oh my goodness. All this time, here I am with twelve years teaching experience, all these experts in the field. [...] And here, here it is. He understands number concept, y’know. And it was only through technology that, that he was able to demonstrate that.
Marla and Tim’s accounts reinforce the research that promotes technology and digital tools as avenues to accommodate learners with diverse special needs (Hutchison, 2015; McEwan, 2014; Schneps, Thomson, Chen, Sonnert & Pomplun, 2013; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011).

4.3.2 Participants also warned of the potential for their students to misuse technology or disengage from meaningful academic study during digital and media literacy instruction.

Participants expressed some wariness over students using digital tools or engaging with media texts in a way that would be inappropriate in a school setting. Tim highlighted the potential for students to misuse technology in the classroom; he reasoned: “You need to teach them how to use [technology] properly. What's the benefit of it? Because everything can be used in the wrong way.” Marla argued that it was her responsibility to ensure her students were using technology for learning “I just, want to make sure that what they are doing on it is meaningful. Um, because it's very easy to just say, ‘Go and play!’ but there's a time and a place for that.” After recognizing the potential for digital tools to improve learning in the classroom, Laura went on to warn against their potential to do just the opposite. She explained: “I also see the downside of it, and I hear from high school teachers that the more involved they get with their phones and technology, the more disengaged they can be in the classroom.”

This potential for disruption and disengagement that participants identified gives credence to Steeves’ (2012) assertion that strong classroom management skills are necessary to maintain a level of control and focus in classrooms engaged with technology and media.

4.3.3 Participants expressed staying current as a challenge for the implementation of their digital and media literacy programs.

Teacher participants expressed keeping up to date with evolving technology and media environments as a challenge for teachers involved in digital and media literacy education. Tim
and Laura characterized their attempts to stay current as a continuous learning journey. “It’s an area that’s constantly changing, right?” reflected Laura, “So you’re just constantly having to keep up with things.” Tim articulated his own personal challenge as follows: “[I’m] trying to stay current. Trying to learn every day. Trying to keep up to date. I’m not doing the same thing over and over again.” Laura noted that even an outside group of experts, Girls Inc., who came into schools to deliver empowering programs that challenge gender stereotypes had trouble staying relevant. She recounts their struggle here:

And they said that they can't keep up. They cannot get their curriculum relevant enough. Because parents are asking, "How can I keep ahead of social media? How can I keep on top of this?" They said that it's moving and changing so quickly you can't even develop programs for the target audience, for the Grade 8s.

The challenges these participants shared in staying current with their digital and media literacy education programs speak to the uneasiness that many teachers can feel towards taking on this subject matter in their classrooms (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2012).

Participants also commented on the challenge to keep their technology up to date. Marla and Laura, who are colleagues at the same TDSB school, both lamented the rate at which their school’s technological resources would become obsolete. According to Marla: “We had thirty computers in our, our computer lab. 26 of them are now obsolete. The school board cut them off.” She explained that, even though the computers are still functional, they were cut off from internet access because they were running Windows XP (a serviceable but outdated operating system) and went on to describe the difficulty the school was having trying to replace the outdated machines as follows:
And my administrator said they gave us $3000 to replace all the computers in the school which, if you're lucky, I mean, maybe buys you 8, y'know. And we're limited to purchasing those computers through the board catalogue, so... things are quite restricted, y'know, and schools don't have a large budget to begin with.

The difficulties participants expressed in keeping on top of media issues and technology suggest that further research into digital and media literacy educational theory and practice should be ongoing in order to keep pace with the dynamic nature of the field. While this research adds to the field, it will need to be revisited and reworked in order to stay relevant in a changing context.

4.3.4 Technological dependency and potential technological failures were also identified by participants as arising challenges within their digital and media literacy programs.

Tim identified technological failure as a common setback within digital and media literacy programs. He articulated this here:

Well, the challenge is to keep the technology current and working. And, what do you do when it doesn't work? And, how, sometimes, frustrating it is to, to have an idea and then have it stop because of something that's not working properly.

Tim recognized that a myriad of little problems can arise when using technology and expressed that he made an effort at his school to provide his peers with technical support. “So, a lot of my preps are, are, y'know, ordering wires or solving problems, or, y'know, plugging in machines that they don't know need to be plugged in, different things like that. Wires and support,” he recounts, later clarifying that this decision to provide support is his own personal choice.

Tim also pinpointed technological dependency—an over-reliance on technological tools—as a problem encountered by educators who use technology and media in their classrooms. He told a humorous story of a colleague who was initially adamantly resistant to
having a Smartboard in his classroom, but eventually embraced it, and then, when the projector
bulb burned out, complained, "What am I gonna do without a Smartboard for three weeks?". This anecdote hints at the danger of becoming too reliant on technology and suggests that, while it can be useful, it should not completely replace more traditional teaching methods.

4.4 Participants Identified a Range of Formal and Informal Supports as well as Barriers to their Efficacy in Teaching Digital and Media Literacy.

Participants identified feeling supported as an important predictor of success in their digital and media literacy programs. Participants expressed a belief that the task of helping students become digitally and media literate is shared by the greater community, and asserted that community support would benefit their students’ learning. They also identified the importance of teachers giving and receiving support within the school setting, as well as teachers receiving support from higher levels of the education system.

4.4.1 Participants expressed that digital and media education was a shared responsibility

All participants identified the responsibility of digital and media literacy instruction to extend beyond their classroom walls. Laura spoke about working “in tandem” with parents, administration, and other education stakeholders. Marla used the popular African adage, “It takes a village.” to express this point. Tim spoke more specifically on the issue:

I think it's everyone. I think it, it comes from, well, the school—if the school doesn't have the stuff, they don't have the money, they don't have the technology, they're limited—then you can't implement it. But, I guess it starts right at the top of the school board, it starts. Then down to the principal—how they're going to use the money. Then, what's the teacher going to do with the technology? Are they gonna get trained? Is there any training? And then it's up to the students if they want to use it properly. The parents [...]

deal with it at home. If they're gonna support any online activities that we're doing, any communication [...] by having internet.

This unanimous assertion by the participants suggests that, while teachers play an important role in the digital and media literacy education or students, they are not alone in the endeavor. They can feel supported by a larger network that shares the responsibility of preparing young learners for success in a changing world.

4.4.2 Participants identified feeling supported in their efforts as a primary factor in their teaching of digital and media literacy

Tim and Marla both expressed the importance of receiving funding support from the board as an integral component of the success of their digital and media literacy programs. Tim explained seeing his school board trending in the right direction:

It's something that they realize is essential. Y'know, they see other boards are doing other things, and they wanna stay current. They wanna stay ahead of- of the curve. So, yeah, it's whatever, I think, is essential. They're gonna fill their money into it.

But financial support was not the only kind of support identified. Marla talked about feeling supported and mentioned informal support she gave to her peers and received from others, including her husband. She also mentioned professional development and school initiatives to share professional knowledge, but she lamented that most professional development was not followed up upon. She mentioned the importance of increasing accountability within these initiatives, “because it's very easy to go and to get the PD and then put it away and say ‘I'm not looking at that again’”. Tim also mentioned the importance of informal support within the school; he stated: “you need the support. Uh, having mentors on your team, in your schools. Having teacher leads is a way to go as well. Somebody to turn to when you get stuck.”
Providing support to peers is a shared responsibility, which means that those who receive support need to be balanced out by those who give support. Tim explained his own supportive role as follows:

Not just "prep teacher" but, I'm a support staff. And some teachers don't think that there's support. Support means you're going to do everything that you think you can to help the teachers in the classroom to deliver a proper curriculum. And, if I'm technology, and that's what I've decided that I'm going to be: "support". And I volunteer for that, then I'm gonna try to do whatever I can to make them use the technology that we have. Because the worst thing is when you have a $500 iPad and it hasn't been turned on for two months.

Tim shared his observations of supporting one staff member in integrating technology into their classroom and watching it “spread” throughout the school.

These findings suggest that it takes a larger supportive network to achieve effective digital and media literacy education for the students of a community. While teachers can support each other and receive support from admin and school staff, this network can also extend to higher levels of the education system and to the greater community at large.

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, the participants interviewed recognized that digital and media literacy education was essential for their students to become critically aware and safe in a changing and potentially dangerous world. The teachers in this study balanced a level of teacher-control in their classroom instruction but gave their students some agency and choice in what they studied in order to ensure their learning remained relevant. The teachers also noticed factors contributing to increased student success and engagement in their study of the subject matter, though they
also highlighted potential areas of concern. Lastly, areas of support were identified that may illuminate general next steps for teachers, administrators, board members, parents, and any stakeholder in education to consider. In the following chapter I discuss the implications of my findings and make recommendations to the broader educational community.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I extend my research findings into a discussion of their implications for teachers and members of the broader educational community. I begin with a brief overview of the main findings from my research into how three TDSB educators understood and taught digital and media literacy. I focus this overview on the following four areas: 1) how my participants’ understanding of the pervasiveness and potential dangers of digital and media environments motivated their program goals of achieving student critical awareness; 2) how my participants’ instructional approaches differed from the student-centred methods championed in the literature; 3) how my participants observed in their digital and media literacy programs the benefits of increased student engagement, motivation, and success, but, at the same time, cautioned against potential downfalls and challenges in teaching digital and media literacy; and 4) how my participants identified the importance of feeling supported within the classroom, the school, and beyond in order to achieve success in their teaching practice. Then, I discuss what these findings mean for teachers, including myself, and for the broader educational community. From my discussion of the implications of my findings, I make recommendations to teachers and members of the education community who seek to improve educational practices in digital and media literacy instruction. Then I pose questions that have arisen from my work and suggest further areas of inquiry for research into digital and media literacy education at the elementary level. Then I conclude with a brief section of final comments on my research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

In the previous chapter I found that, while my participants had different approaches to digital and media literacy education, they expressed some common beliefs, motivations, and
goals that related to their practice. The participants expressed an awareness of the ubiquity of digital and media environments in their students’ lives and shared concerns over student safety within these potentially dangerous environments. They also expressed improving their students’ critical awareness and understanding of these environments as key goals in their digital and media literacy programs.

Participants described instructional approaches to digital and media literacy that gave students some choice over the content they studied, but the design and implementation of the lessons were largely teacher-directed. This approach provided some contrast to the literature that championed a more student-centred or student-directed style of pedagogy as a more effective means of teaching digital and media literacy (Blackwell, 2012; Hoechsmann & DeWaard, 2015; Jones, 2005; Steeves, 2012). Maintaining a controlled learning environment in the classroom may have been part of the reasoning behind participants’ hesitation to adopt a more student-centred approach to digital and media literacy instruction. Participants saw digital and media literacy as interrelated subjects, but did not advocate for always teaching the two concurrently and instead reasoned that teaching them separately could provide for more focused instruction. This sentiment contrasts with research literature that claims that the more effective way to teach digital and media literacy is to teach them together (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2008; Jones, 2005; Ontario, 2006; Rogow, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). All participants did agree that digital and media literacy lessons could be integrated into other areas of the curriculum.

Increased student engagement, enjoyment, and success were reported by all participants to be benefits of their digital and media literacy programs. It was identified as an area of study that had the potential to reach students with special and behavioural needs and provide them with an opportunity to achieve at higher levels. However, participants also saw the potential for
misuse, distraction, and disengagement from meaningful academic study when using digital tools and media texts in the classroom. Participants expressed the difficult challenge of keeping their teaching relevant in the dynamic field of technological and media education and warned that technological dependence, obsolescence, and failure were potential pitfalls in their practice.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of feeling supported in their classrooms, in their schools, and beyond in order to effectively achieve the goals of their digital and media literacy programs. They identified financial support from the school board, parental support from the community, and professional support from their peers as specific areas that could increase the efficacy of teacher practice in digital and media literacy.

Next, I will discuss what implications these findings have for teachers as well as the broader educational community.

5.2 Implications

In this section I discuss the implications of my findings by exploring what they mean for individual teacher practices as well as the broader educational community. Then I discuss the implications my research has on my personal identity as a teacher-researcher.

5.2.1 Implications for the educational community

My participants expressed beliefs about the pervasiveness of digital and media environments as motivation for their teaching of the subject matter. The implication here is that, in order to teach digital or media literacy effectively, teachers should have a developed understanding of the current nature of the digital and media environments that make up such a large part of their students’ lives. In this way, my research plays an important role in examining and presenting experienced teachers’ beliefs about the nature of the field. More specifically, the concern of student safety and potential digital and media threats was found to drive participants’
practice. These concerns suggest the need for increased focus on digital and media literacy education by teachers, administrators, researchers, and other educational stakeholders in order to better equip students with the critical awareness and understanding that will protect them from harm.

The disparity between the student-centred practices advocated for in some of the literature and the teacher-centred practices described by the participants in this study suggests hesitations and possible apprehensions by teachers toward ceding control of their lessons to their students. This implies that there are some practical reasons against adopting a completely student-centred approach to digital and media literacy pedagogy. The fact that all three participants—who had each been identified by their peers as effective instructors—used a teacher-directed approach in their programs suggests that a more teacher-centred method has some merit at the elementary level. Furthermore, the implication here is that an “all or nothing” approach to the teacher-centred versus student-centred paradigm in pedagogy may have drawbacks in practice. Instead, developing a pedagogical approach that balances student-centred and teacher-centred methodology and incorporates the benefits of both may lead to more effective digital and media literacy instruction. If that is the case, this balance should be taken into consideration by teachers when planning their instruction, by administrators when evaluating teachers’ instructional practices, and by educational policy-makers when endorsing initiatives and “best practices” in digital and media literacy education.

The increased student engagement, enjoyment, and success that the participants reportedly observed within their digital and media literacy programs adds credence to research literature that describes the captivating appeal of this subject area for students (Blackwell, 2012; Jones, 2005; Scheibe, 2004; Steeves, 2012; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Participants reported
incidents in practice where they observed students with special and behavioural needs
demonstrate academic success in their digital and media literacy programs while these students
were struggling in other subject areas. These findings suggest that digital and media literacy
education could be one avenue for achieving the goal of “Reaching Every Student” which is the
primary target in The School Effectiveness Framework outlined in The Ontario Ministry of
Education’s (2013) guidebook, *Learning For All*. Furthermore, participants agreed that digital
and media literacy lessons could be integrated into other subject areas. This kind of integration
could be a means of engaging and promoting student success in subject areas where they are
unmotivated and achieve below expectations. Teachers and administrators should be aware of
the potential to reach students and support their learning through digital and media literacy in
their classrooms and schools. Parents and community members should also be aware of this
potential when considering extra-curricular options that support learning outside of school for
students under their care. At the Ministry of Education and School Board level, members should
take these findings into consideration when choosing and supporting initiatives aimed at
promoting academic excellence in their student populations. This research adds to the literature
that champions digital and media literacy education for its potential to improve student learning
in school.

However, this potential improvement of student learning is not guaranteed. The
challenges and downfalls that the participants outlined in their digital and media literacy
programs imply that there are both effective and ineffective ways to deliver digital and media
literacy instruction. Educators should be aware of the possibility that students become distracted
and disengaged from meaningful learning when working with or studying digital tools and media
texts. They should also be aware of the danger of overreliance on technology in the classroom.
and the potential for unexpected technological failures to occur. Administrators who expect their staff to deliver digital and media literacy lessons in their school should be understanding of these potential hindrances.

One challenge participants mentioned, that warrants specific mention here, was the difficulty in keeping up to date with the changing digital and media landscapes that they were expected to teach their students. The rapid growth of technology and the constant inundation of new media creates a heightened degree of difficulty to remain relevant compared to teaching in other subject areas. Teachers and other educational stakeholders should be aware that this challenge exists, but they should also be aware of other educators who effectively rise to and meet this challenge, so that they do not believe it to be insurmountable. Here my research, and related future research, can play an important role.

Lastly, participants expressed a shared belief on the importance of feeling supported in their classrooms, schools, and beyond in order to teach digital and media literacy effectively. Teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and all educational stakeholders should know that they can be potential sources of support for teachers engaged in digital and media literacy education. Whether they are providing guidance, technical assistance, funding, acts of appreciation, or otherwise, all members of the educational community should know that they can choose to work in solidarity with teachers to support the digital and media literacy education of the younger generation.

Next I will discuss the personal implications my findings have for myself as a teacher-researcher.

5.2.2 Implications for myself as a teacher-researcher
As a teacher-researcher it is my duty to continually work to develop my pedagogical framework by engaging in formal as well as informal research in order to improve my own professional practice. In terms of digital and media literacy education, my research findings lead me to further develop my awareness and understanding of the ubiquity of technology and media in my students lives, as well as the dangers present in these digital and media environments. Therefore, an overall goal for my future digital and media literacy education programs must be to increase my students’ critical awareness of these environments.

The disparity I found between student-centred approaches championed in literature versus the more teacher-centred approaches enacted by my participants implies that I should think about the pros and cons of both approaches before deciding on one or the other. Furthermore, this disparity suggests that I should read educational research with a degree of criticism, and compare the viewpoints presented in literature to the viewpoints of experienced educators whenever possible.

My participants’ recognition that digital and media literacy education has the potential to engage a wide range of students and lead to their academic success will motivate me to consider integrating digital and media literacy education into other subject areas. However, the potential downfalls and drawbacks that my participants identified mean that I cannot look at technology and media integration as a guaranteed panacea for students who struggle academically. So, I need to take care and develop an approach to digital and media literacy education that promotes meaningful learning, rather than detracts from it.

Lastly, my research affirms the importance of support for teachers engaged in digital and media literacy education. I need to be aware of this importance in order to seek out and provide support throughout my teaching career. Just as my students need to feel supported in their
learning, myself, and other teachers need to feel supported in their teaching in order to experience success.

In the next section I will make recommendations based on the implications discussed above.

5.3 Recommendations

In this section I make recommendations to a range of educational stakeholders based off of my research findings. First I make recommendations to practicing and future teachers and then I make recommendations to other educational stakeholders, including administrators, parents, school boards, faculties of education, and researchers.

5.3.1 Recommendations for teachers

Due to the dynamic nature of the field of digital and media literacy education, teachers should continually read, discuss, and (re)evaluate issues related to the digital and media environments in which they and their students live. By constantly developing their beliefs and understandings of these issues, they can more clearly teach and articulate the goals of their digital and media literacy programs. Similarly, teachers should be aware of the dangers associated with digital and media texts and environments in order to protect their students from harm and prepare them for success in these realms. Teachers can share their views, concerns, and reflections on practice directly with peers, administrators, and parents, but they can also share these views with a wider audience online through teacher blogs and professional online communities. Higher critical awareness of the nature of the subject matter on the part of the teachers should allow more effective instruction of digital and media literacy, which should lead to heightened critical awareness of their students.
The incongruity between student-centred pedagogy and teacher centred pedagogy in the research literature and participants’ practice leads to the recommendation that teachers engage in reflective practice and use their professional judgement when choosing a pedagogical approach to digital and media literacy. Teachers could start by offering a high level of teacher direction and guidance and over time gradually release responsibility to the students, while reflecting on what is effective and ineffective in their particular approach with a given group of students. Constant innovation that is based off of critical reflection on practice is necessary in order to remain effective and improve as a digital and media literacy educator.

Teachers should try integrating digital and media literacy instruction into other subject areas in order to engage and support the success of a wide range of students. However, they should be wary of when to integrate (and how many different subjects they are integrating) and when to direct focus on specific learning goals in a subject area. While integration may help students who struggle in a specific subject area, trying to do too much at once may be overwhelming for both the teacher and their students.

Feeling supported is an integral part of effective teaching. Therefore, teachers should seek out support for themselves when teaching digital and media literacy. They should also try to provide support for others when possible. Teachers can ask mentors for advice and feedback as well as make time to observe effective digital and media literacy instructors implement lessons. They can also make themselves available for giving advice, feedback, and demonstrations to peers if they are effective instructors. Asking for and providing technical support can help alleviate some of the challenges involved with keeping digital and media literacy education functional and relevant. Furthermore, sharing examples of effective digital and media literacy lessons either directly or online can increase teacher accountability and provide motivation and
guidance to other teachers who wish to engage their students with the subject matter. Lastly, teachers can draw on their students’ own experiences and understandings of the digital and media landscapes in which they live. If students are providing some suggestions and support for teachers to keep their teaching relevant to their experience they may feel more valued and have higher agency and motivation to succeed academically, while also taking on some of their teacher’s workload and providing them more time to act as a facilitator.

While, these are some recommendations for teachers who wish to improve their digital and media literacy instruction, it is important to note that every teacher’s approach will be unique to their own experience as well as that of their students. Therefore, it is up to each teacher to use their professional judgement when deciding the content and form of their digital and media literacy education program.

5.3.2 Recommendations for the broader educational community

Because the field of digital and media education is dynamic, ongoing educational research is required to assist teachers and educational stakeholders in the development of the field’s pedagogy. Academics and teacher-researchers should continue to study digital and media literacy education and to share their findings with the broader educational community. Ministry officials, board members, and administrators should work collaboratively to make sure that these findings are effectively shared with teachers in a way that does not overload and disengage them. Meanwhile, the administrators and policy-makers within the educational community should provide opportunities for teachers to share their own experiences and concerns about digital and media literacy education so that the process of improving its practice is collaborative rather than mandated. In this way, members of the education system can work together to develop a shared understanding of the nature of the changing world of their students and develop ways to best
prepare them for safety and success within it. Parents and community members should also be part of this conversation in order to support student learning outside of school, either at home or in extra-curricular settings.

Similarly, principals and superintendents should provide teachers additional opportunities and incentives to share and reflect upon their practices, failures, and successes in teaching digital and media literacy within a safe setting. One existing example of this kind of sharing is found in the Ontario College of Teachers magazine, Professionally Speaking, which highlights the work of effective teachers in digital and media literacy education, as well as other subject areas. The challenge here lies in making these opportunities available without adding to teachers’ already substantial workloads.

The Ministry of Education has made many resources available to teachers engaged in digital and media literacy education, but there is a need for these resources to be continually updated in order to respond to changing digital and media landscapes. For example, Volume 7 of A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4 to 6 focuses on media literacy pedagogy and is a helpful resource for teachers, but it was written in 2008. After almost a decade, it may be losing some of its relevance. For example, in the document there is a sample lesson on detecting bias in a television newscast, but no mention of social media. How effectively will that lesson engage students who receive most of their news through Facebook and Twitter?

Finally, it is important for all members of the educational community to support teachers in their digital and media literacy education programs. Board members and administrators need to provide and direct funding effectively to support the technological demands of the classroom. This means listening to the specific needs of teachers so that money is spent prudently on devices and resources that will actually be used frequently and effectively at the classroom level. There
must also be a means of maintaining and dealing with issues that arise with given technology and resources. School administrators should make an effort to hire teachers with some proficiency in areas of technology and media and provide opportunities and motivation for these teachers to support other staff in the school. Parents and community members can also support teachers by reasonably providing the technology, resources, and guidance needed for their children to continue to meaningfully interact with digital tools and media texts outside of the classroom. Parents and community members with proficiency can also volunteer some of their time and effort to provide helpful support to classroom teachers in the school. When the entire education community works together to support the education of its students, the potential for success increases significantly.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Since the nature of digital landscapes and media environments is dynamic and constantly changing over time there is a need for ongoing research in the area of its pedagogy. Furthermore, there is a great deal of eclecticism and diversity in how digital and media literacy is taught in schools (Hobbs, 2004; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2008). Therefore, similar research that examines more voices of experienced educators who effectively teach the subject area would allow more insight into good teacher practices that prepare students for success in a world that is increasingly impacted by digital and media influence. Furthermore, the participants in this study listed a range of barriers and obstacles that hindered their teaching. Further research into how other educators avoid or overcome these challenges would be valuable in advancing an understanding of what is effective instruction of digital and media literacy.

While the research in this study was limited to only three TDSB teachers, the findings have highlighted some potentially fruitful areas of focus for further study. Specifically, I believe
a more focused study on why teachers are hesitant to adopt highly student-centred approaches to digital and media literacy instruction would be valuable to educators and to the broader educational community. Through a comparative analysis of practicing teachers’ experiences with student-centred versus teacher-centred approaches to digital and media literacy instruction, one could further explore some of the benefits and drawbacks associated with the two methods, in a way that is grounded in actual teaching experience. Alternatively, practicing teachers could document their experiences moving from a more teacher-directed digital and media literacy classroom to one that is more student-centred, and the data collected through this documentation could be analyzed, discussed, and presented as research literature.

Lastly, since all the interviewed participants agreed that the digital and media literacy education of their students was a responsibility that was shared by the larger community, it may be worthwhile to conduct qualitative research that would examine the beliefs and practices of other stakeholders in the education communities. These stakeholders could include, but not be limited to, administrators, board members, parents, Ministry officials, and even the students themselves. Such research would add much more breadth to the context of digital and media literacy education.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

From this experience conducting qualitative research into the practice of digital and media literacy education I have fortified my resolve to prepare my students for safety and success in their changing world. Though I have gained a great deal of insight into the issues surrounding digital and media literacy education at the elementary level, I know that this is only the beginning of a lifelong learning journey. I will continue in my role as a teacher-researcher to investigate issues related to digital and media literacy education in available literature as well as
in my own future classrooms, and I will share my findings both formally and informally as the opportunities to do so arise. I will take the sage advice of my teacher participant, Tim, who advised me to start small and to continue to grow, learn, and innovate as my experience builds. Along with my continual efforts to improve my own practice, I will work hard to provide the technical, practical, and emotional support that I can to help other teachers do the same. As I find my own place in this ever changing world, I hope to assist others—students, peers, mentors, family, and friends—by being an excellent digital and media literacy educator.
References


Appendix A: Consent Form

Date:

Dear ________________________,

My Name is Nathan Zielke and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on instructional approaches to digital and media literacy. I am interested in interviewing elementary teachers who teach digital and media literacy in their classrooms. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Nathan Zielke
Phone Number: (647) 703-8363
Email: nzielke@gmail.com
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Phone: (416) 821-6496 E-mail: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.
I have read the letter provided to me by Nathan Zielke and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ____________________________________________

Name: (printed) ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how a small sample of Ontario elementary educators teach digital and media literacy and what outcomes they observe for the purpose of informing the larger educational community. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on digital and media literacy education. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A - Background Information

1. How long have you been teaching elementary students?
2. What grades and subjects have you taught?
3. What is your educational background? What did you study for your post secondary degree(s)?
4. As you know, we are here today to talking about your experience teaching digital and media literacy. Can you tell me more about what learning experiences relevant to this topic you yourself have had?
   a. University course work?
   b. Professional/employment background?
   c. Professional development?
   d. What are the primary sources of your learning in this area?
5. What do you identify as your personal strengths or areas of expertise as an educator?
   a. Do you consider digital and media literacy to be an area of expertise that you have?
   b. How, if at all, have you enacted leadership in this area in your school or board?

Section B - Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

1. What does digital literacy mean to you? How would you describe it to someone outside the field of education?
2. What does media literacy mean to you?
3. In what ways do you understand these two forms of literacy as being similar and different?
4. Why do you believe digital/media literacy should be taught at an elementary level?
5. In your view, are elementary students being supported at school in the development of their digital and media literacy skills?
6. What is your view on how digital and media literacy is included in the curriculum?
7. From your perspective, what does a school need to do in order to effectively implement a digital/media literacy program?
8. And what does a teacher need? (e.g. access to tech, resources, physical space, particular training/education)
9. In your view, who holds the greatest responsibility for developing students’ digital/media literacy education (students, teacher, administration, parents) and why?

Section C - Teacher Practices

1. Do you integrate media/digital literacy instruction into your curriculum or do you teach it separately from other subjects?
   a. What is your rationale for this approach?
2. Roughly, how often do you deliver digital/media literacy lessons?
3. How would you summarize the learning goals of your digital and media literacy program?
4. What are some kinds of digital and media texts that your students study?
   a. Can you provide some examples of these and lessons you have taught (*probe re: grade, goals, opportunities for learning)
5. What are some kinds of digital and media texts that your students create?
   a. Can you provide some examples of these and lessons you have taught (*probe re: grade, goals, opportunities for learning)
6. In general, how do your students respond to your digital/media literacy lessons?
7. What indicators of learning and/or engagement have you observed?
8. How do you assess the digital and media literacy abilities of your students?
9. Can you provide some examples of how you have assessed students’ engagement with and production of media texts?
10. How would you describe your students’ overall capabilities?
11. In your experience, what are some of the benefits of teaching digital/media literacy to elementary students?
12. In your experience, what are some of the challenges of teaching digital/media literacy to elementary students?

Section D - Supports and Challenges

1. Have you ever received training specifically in digital/media literacy education? If yes, describe the training.
   a. Are you aware of any training that is available? If yes, describe the training.
2. What factors support your implementation of a digital and media literacy education program?
3. What specific resources facilitate your teaching practice in this area? (e.g. access to materials and technology, particular websites, media texts, tools, guest speakers etc.)
4. Does the school make the technological resources available to you or do you have to provide your own?
5. Are there any other resources or challenges you would like to share that we have not
already mentioned?

Section E - Next Steps

1. What advice would you give to a novice elementary teacher who wants to effectively teach their students digital/media literacy?

Thank you for your participation in this research study. I appreciate your time and your responses.