INTRODUCTION

Defamiliarizing Media Literacy

David Buckingham (2007) posits that media literacy is the outcome of media engagement, but media education is what shapes practice. In the vernacular use of educators and policymakers in North America, "media literacy" is the more common term for the formal and informal process of teaching with or about media. Media literacy education concerns the pedagogy of media literacy, and media literacy educators are the practitioners who are involved with shaping, promoting, and defining the goals of media literacy.

For more than a dozen years I have been a media literacy educator. I am also an environmentalist deeply committed to education for sustainability. As I define it in this book, sustainability education encourages *whole-systems thinking* that is ecological and participatory (Sterling, 2004, p. 11). Sustainability education promotes *green cultural citizenship*, which means embodying sustainable behaviors and cultural practices that shape and promote ecological values within the interconnected realms of society, economy, and environment. In my everyday practice I try to unite perspectives from the fields of media and sustainability education, but having a foot in both worlds has been a struggle. In the process of developing a middle way I have encountered resistance from both educational cultures. Though media literacy advocates often sympathize with environmental issues, the general practice of media literacy marginalizes ecological perspectives. Likewise, there are many in the field of environmental education who believe media and technology are anti-nature (Bowers, 2000; Traina, 1995). Mediating these differences to find common ground has become my life work and is the purpose of this book. As such, in this book I take a deep dive into my community of practice to analyze why this disconnection exists. By mapping the field, I propose a potential solution.

To contextualize my perspective, I would like to share two pivotal experiences, one at a popular congregation of environmentalists and another at an international media literacy conference in Europe. The first occurred in 2003 at the Bioneers conference in San Rafael, California, which is a

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gathering of "social and scientific innovators from all walks of life and disciplines who have peered deep into the heart of living systems to understand how nature operates, and to mimic 'nature's operating instructions' to serve human ends without harming the web of life" (Bioneers, 2013). This annual event features a variety of visionary thinkers and activists who are developing solutions for a safer and healthier world. I attended the conference with a group of Latinos and Native Americans from New Mexico with the support of a grant from the Pond Foundation. We were invited to encourage cultural diversity at the conference. Being of mixed cultural heritage (Latino/Euro-American), I am accustomed to playing the role of a "bridger"—one who mediates between different social groups and worldviews. At the time of the conference I was a media literacy educator working primarily in Native American and Latino communities. During that time I was balancing my role as an educator of critical thinking tools, media technologies, popular culture, and digital storytelling with the cultural reality of indigenous and land-based youths in rural New Mexico. The conference was an exciting opportunity to see how the various perspectives I was negotiating would intersect with leading sustainability models.

I attended a session led by global justice activist and anti-technology crusader Jerry Mander (1991, 2002). The panel was organized around themes developed in a book he co-edited, *The Case Against the Global Economy: And for a Turn Toward the Local* (Mander & Goldsmith, 1996), which focuses on the rise of globalization and the danger it poses for traditional cultures, economies, and environments. These were relevant issues for the communities in which I was working, for many of them were experiencing the consequence of the privatization of local resources, such as water, and the impact on their ecosystems of military research at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Throughout the presentation I kept seeing the connection between media and the ideology of globalization, helping me realize that media literacy could be used as a tool for students to understand and debate dominant economic discourses. Furthermore, a seed was planted that media literacy could be an invaluable tool for sustainability education. After the panel I approached Mander and asked if he was willing to meet with me to discuss the connection I was making between media education and global justice activism. He graciously accepted and later that day he joined me at a community table near the conference's main bookstore. After asking him to sign my personal copy of *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (2002), I then presented my concept. I suggested that an excellent way to introduce the complexity of globalization to young people is through media literacy. I suggested that using

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media texts as probes and *objects-to-think-with* could promote discussion and dialogue about globalization and social justice debates. Furthermore, I proposed that media literacy could be a way to introduce sustainability to students, just as it had been used by public health advocates to teach young people about the hazards of smoking and drinking alcohol. I suggested that we could work together to develop this project, but he answered me rather unexpectedly. He told me that he thought media literacy was a good idea, but he was against it. When I asked why, he replied that it is because media literacy "makes media more interesting."

And that was the end of our discussion. But the encounter prompted an inner dialogue that continues in this book. Education should interest learners in the world around them, a world that is highly mediated. Nonetheless, I understand the spirit of Mander's response, which is that potentially media literacy makes media more attractive. Indeed, some research suggests that didactic media literacy produces a boomerang effect by encouraging the opposite behavior it was intended to mitigate (for an overview of the research, see Banerjee & Kubey, 2014). So rather than encourage critical thinking, when practiced in certain ways, media literacy potentially can make media consumption more enticing to students. Moreover, there is a school of thought often identified as Neo-Luddism that views media and technology as desensitizing us from living systems (Bowers, 2000; Ellul, 1964; Glendinning, 1994; Mander, 1991; Mumford, 1970; Sale, 1996). I should have realized that what I proposed went against the kinds of arguments Mander has made in his writings and activism for the past 30 years. Yet, I felt very uncomfortable with his response, for I knew through personal experience that media literacy is very empowering. Nonetheless, the discussion with him prompted me towards this inquiry: When it comes to sustainability education, would media literacy encourage unsustainable cultural practices? Or could it be part of the solution?

Fast-forward nine years later. In November 2012, in the midst of doing my primary research for this book, I participated in the Media & Learning conference in Brussels, Belgium. This international gathering was touted as an opportunity to promote "media wisdom" in Europe, bringing "together practitioners and policy makers who want to contribute to the development of digital and media skills in education and to find new and effective ways to embed media into the learning process" (Media & Learning, 2012). I attended the conference in order to network with other European media educators and to co-present a talk, *Greening Media Education*, with my colleague John Blewitt. The pre-conference negotiations that led to our presentation were fraught with frustration. In our original proposal we requested an hour-long workshop, a

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format that would allow us to best present our material. Instead, we were placed in a grab-bag session during the last time slot of the conference, a late-afternoon panel that featured two other speakers presenting on completely unrelated topics. Initially, we were granted only 15 minutes for our entire presentation. We argued for additional time and in the end were given 20 minutes. Though our talk was streamed on the web to a wider audience, by the time we presented there were only about a dozen people in the auditorium. When asked if they had any questions, none responded. Unfortunately, I experienced the same lack of audience participation and marginalization at a similar media education conference held the year before in London.

During the Brussels conference I had one particular experience that illustrates the issues raised in this book. The day before my presentation I encountered the head of a major media literacy organization. I mentioned that I was investigating the discourses of media literacy educators to search for a bridge between media literacy and sustainability education. She responded by saying that she did not see any connection. I replied by discussing the recent scientific findings that demonstrate a significant increase of CO_2 in the atmosphere, predicting that we might be nearing a tipping point where the opportunity to prevent a global ecological catastrophe would be lost (Barnosky et al., 2012). I proposed that as media literacy educators we had a responsibility to address this problem because within the next ten years all the gadget usage promoted by our education practices would contribute to the doubling of current CO_2 emissions generated by the internet, which is already the equivalent of the global airline industry (Cubitt, Hassan, & Volkmer, 2011). She wondered how CO_2 emissions could possibly have anything to do with media, and I responded that because all our gadgets are tethered to server farms, our internet usages are mostly powered by coal (Cubitt et al., 2011). She then replied that sustainability was one of many possible issues that could be taken up by media literacy educators, but it did not demand special attention. With that, she excused herself to prepare for her session.

My conversation with Mander in 2003 and the experience at the Brussels conference nine years later bookend a spectrum of views about the relationship between sustainability education and media literacy, where sustainability educators view media education antagonistically and for media educators sustainability is seen as an unrelated, irrelevant issue. These incidents were not atypical of the many encounters I have had in the past dozen years. My struggle has been to define the niche where these seemingly opposed views can be reconciled. Consequently, I have felt a desire to identify

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more clearly the taken-for-granted world in which my peers in the media literacy community operate. Since it is a world in which I am deeply involved, it was important to investigate my practitioner community with a renewed perspective.

Ideally, it should be possible to develop a framework that combines media literacy and ecoliteracy, but as my past experience demonstrates, an ontological difference between the disciplines that inform these educational approaches makes the process difficult. Media literacy is greatly influenced by assumptions formulated within the traditions of media studies and communications, which in turn have been guided by the dominant paradigm of mechanism arising from the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions. Sustainability education challenges the assumptions of this prevailing paradigm. Thus, media literacy and sustainability education discourses (the way practitioners communicate about their respective fields) are substantially different. As noted by Meadows (1991, p. 4),

> Your paradigm is so intrinsic to your mental processes that you are hardly aware of its existence, until you try to communicate with someone with a different paradigm. Listen to an ecologist talk with an economist, a pro-lifer with a pro-choicer, a right-winger with a left-winger. In the difficulties of cross-paradigm discussion, both parties begin to be aware, often uncomfortably, of unspoken, fundamental assumptions they do not share.

For this reason, "It can be an important strategy for people to seek to understand [discourses] better and bring them to overt attention when there are conflicts in communication" (Gee, 2011a, p. 172). Though there may not be an explicit communication conflict between media literacy and sustainability educators, the fact that there are so few resources that combine the two perspectives demonstrates that there is an implicit boundary between them that is taken for granted. Therefore, mapping this boundary is essential for bridging the disciplinary approaches of media literacy and sustainability education.

In order to gain insights into these disciplinary boundaries, this book features an investigation into how media literacy practitioners use metaphors to frame both the role of media education in the world and how it affects green cultural citizenship. This involved analyzing website documents and teacher resources of seven North American media literacy organizations as well as interviewing nine key practitioners within a bounded system I call the *media literacy ecosystem* (a network of practitioners who share a generally agreed-upon worldview about media literacy, see below). Drawing on an ecocritical framework, I analyzed the discourses of the media literacy ecosystem by using multi-

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site situational analysis, qualitative media analysis, and critical discourse analysis. As a result, this book explores how media literacy practitioners participate in meaning-making systems that reproduce pre-existing environmental ideologies. The findings show that media literacy education is grounded in a *mechanistic* worldview, thereby perpetuating unsustainable cultural practices in education. By problematizing the mechanistic discourses of media literacy education, the aim of this book is to raise awareness and to offer potential solutions for changing the nature of those same discourses. As such, I propose a model of media literacy that incorporates green cultural citizenship, called ecomedia literacy, and outline a path forward so that sustainability becomes a priority for media literacy educators.

During my research I deployed two strategies often used by media literacy educators to analyze media. The first is to defamiliarize the familiar. Because media are all around us and they embed taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, it can be difficult to see them with fresh eyes. Media literacy educators use a variety of tactics to defamiliarize everyday media, including deconstruction and media production, each offering different ways to critically engage with media. The second is to treat media texts as objects-to-think-with to provoke questions and generate new ideas.

I attempted both strategies by starting with the assumption that media literacy involves mediamaking: as educators we design teaching materials, engage in online discussions, produce web pages, edit videos, write books, and scribe articles. I wanted to investigate the media that we use in our daily practice as media literacy educators, but defamiliarize myself with them through discourse analysis to identify commonly used metaphors. To do so, I created visual documentation of the data I collected by using tools such as word clouds. This allowed me to see general patterns and juxtapositions of terms that practitioners use to describe their worldview. But my ultimate tool for defamiliarization was to re-conceptualize the entire field of media education as a "media literacy ecosystem." This strategy resonated with a number of novel approaches that explain social relations, media, technology, and communications by using ecosystem models (Altheide, 1995; Guattari, 2008; Luhmann, 1989; Nardi & O'Day, 2000; Naughton, 2012; Tracy, 2012). By viewing media literacy as a dynamic system of practitioners interacting with other social systems (such as education and media), I was able to understand more clearly how media educators share a certain worldview.

As Greenwood and Levin (2007, p. 69) assert, "The role of theories is to explain how what happened was possible and took place, to lay out possible scenarios for the future, and to give good reasons for the ones that seem to be

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the probable next outcomes." Because currently there are very few resources or methodologies that combine media literacy education with green cultural citizenship, this study can contribute to an understanding for how media education practice can be greened. Additionally, the study's results will add to the body of knowledge regarding the methodology of sustainability education. Of significance is having a reflective map of the particular meaning design that governs contemporary media literacy practices. Given that root metaphors about media, communication, and learning determine the kinds of questions and problems to be studied, it is significant to situate these metaphors and the kind of ideological work they do within a larger systems of educational practices. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of current practices, media literacy practitioners can strategize about how to incorporate sustainability into their work.

Who Is This Book for?

The primary audience for this book is educators working in the area of media literacy, media studies, and cultural studies. However, the language and tone is free of disciplinary jargon to appeal to those who are working in the area of sustainability education, environmental studies, and social justice. Bridging these disciplines is an emerging trend, as reflected in a number of new professional associations that seek to incorporate sustainability into communications and media studies. Examples include the Ecology, Environment, Culture Network (http://www.ntnu.edu/eecn), International Environmental Communication Association (http://theieca.org), and Institute for Sustainable Communication (www.sustainablecommunication.org). Within traditional academic associations there are now numerous subcommittees dealing with sustainability and communications, including subgroups within the National Communication Association, International Communication Association, and Western States Communication Association.

Though there is no specific book that covers both media literacy and sustainability literacy, there are several recent works that are correlating environmental issues with the media, including *Greening the Media* (Maxwell & Miller, 2012), *Climate Change and the Media* (Lewis & Boyce, 2009), *Environment, Media and Communication* (Hansen, 2009), and *Communicating Nature* (Corbett, 2006). In the realm of sustainability education, coming closest to my approach are *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis* (Kahn, 2010) and *The Ecology of Learning: Sustainability, Lifelong Learning, and Everyday Life* (Blewitt, 2006). The elements that make *Greening Media Education*

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unique are how seemingly disparate realms of education and academia are woven together, including emerging digital media pedagogies, ecoliteracy, ecologically oriented communication theory, media studies, media literacy, and sustainability education.

Navigating the Book

In Chapter 1, I introduce a theoretical framework and overview to explain my path to gaining insight into the meaning system of media literacy. In doing so, I first provide a summary of the relationship between media literacy and sustainability, and I propose a model of green cultural citizenship. In subsequent subsections, I outline the theoretical roots of my study, starting with a discussion of how ecocriticism enables us to understand the way in which discourses, environmental ideologies, and metaphors construe the taken-for-granted world of media literacy educators. I then discuss how these discourses work within situated contexts by introducing the model of information ecologies.

Chapter 2 compares and contrasts mechanism with ecology and explores in-depth the use of metaphors in media studies and media education with a focus on the historical uses of media and environmental metaphors. Chapter 3 takes a field walk through the media ecosystem by examining various views of contemporary media, comparing and contrasting the traditional approach based on the industrial mass-media model with emerging concepts of media based on social networks and the internet. I explore how prevailing views of legacy media have dominated media studies and examine alternative perspectives that seek to reframe media disciplines from an ecocentric point of view.

In Chapter 4, I map the media literacy ecosystem's positions and discourses. I start by reviewing how media studies have impacted the major debates in media literacy. Because media literacy debates have been explored exhaustively elsewhere, my overview is selective in order to focus on those elements that relate to the problem of greening media literacy. I then summarize my research into the worldview of different media literacy organizations and practitioners, including a detailed breakdown of my data collection process and analytical methods.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of my research findings, which reveal the dominant paradigm of the media literacy ecosystem. Here I describe the implicit assumptions found in media literacy documents about media, implicated actors, lifeworld, public sphere, and literacy practices. I then discuss

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and critique these results from an ecocritical perspective to show how mechanism dominates mainstream thinking about media literacy. I also discuss what I perceive to be ethnocentric thinking in common media literacy practices that hinder a sustainability cultural perspective. Next I discuss the barriers and opportunities for bridging media literacy and sustainability education. I close the chapter with a number of proposals for future action.

Chapter 6 clarifies my underlying assumptions about learning, cognition, communication, and sustainability education. I offer a short overview of ecoliteracy and sustainability education, and then bridge those concepts with media literacy. I then propose an alternative green media literacy framework called ecomedia literacy. I close the chapter by discussing a case study in which I implemented the ecomedia literacy framework in a classroom situation.

In Chapter 7, I conclude by highlighting trends from emerging social movements, digital storytelling, and sustainability communication that offer new pathways for media education. Here I argue that emerging media literacy practices can be leveraged as a kind of sustainability media education.

Situating My Worldview: An Autobiography of Learning

This book is motivated by a desire to solve the enigma of why it is that media literacy educators are generally disconnected from ecological issues. Another desire is to search for common ground between media education and sustainability education, to discover a point of contact between these worldviews. I do not believe sustainability is just another pet cause for media literacy educators to take on. Like racism, gender, identity, violence, and other key social concerns of media literacy practitioners, our living systems are entitled to the attention and care they deserve. As I use the term in this book, *living systems* comprise the flow of energy and matter that sustain all life. According to Capra (2008), living systems include individual organisms, social systems, and ecosystems. I use the term instead of *environment* to avoid the dichotomization that results from the differentiation between humans and nature/environment in everyday language use. As ecocritics and ecological communication scholars have diligently noted, binaries that distinguish between *humans* and *nature* create an artificially constructed barrier that obscures how humans are embedded within and are a part of living systems (Buell, 2001; Cantrill & Oravec, 1996; Corbett, 2006; Coupe, 2000a, 2000b; Garrard, 2004; Milstein & Dickinson, 2012). A theme throughout this book is how deeply engrained compartmentalization is in our metaphors and thinking about media and living systems. But because our biosphere is

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endangered, we are in danger. Therefore, this is not just an intellectual curiosity, but also a desire to heal a broken paradigm that has led to the ecological disconnection I experience in my field of practice. Not only do I want to feel connected—to be part of a "tribe" of media educators who care about the environment—but I also want to be part of the solution.

As my own background and experience create the context for this book, it is useful to explain it in more depth. Clarke (2005) asserts that a situation of inquiry results in an interactive ecological system where both the researcher and research topic are embedded and situated within the unit of analysis. For example, the media literacy ecosystem is a bounded system that I have defined for the purpose of my analysis. Though based on empirical phenomena, the choice of metaphor, data sites, methods, and epistemological strategies are particular to this inquiry. These choices arise from my unique position within the media literacy ecosystem. As a media literacy practitioner trying to "green" media literacy practices, I believe that the promise of media literacy to encourage cultural citizenship has not been fulfilled because my community of practitioners is generally not addressing sustainability. Moreover, as an active participant in the media literacy ecosystem, I have had direct contact with the situation at hand and have actively written and advocated for my particular view (López, 2008; 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2012; 2013). It is therefore imperative that my position be explicit.

The impetus for developing an educational philosophy that combines media literacy and sustainability education can be traced to my childhood experience in alternative education. My formal education through eighth grade was at a public alternative school in Los Angeles that was founded the year I entered first grade, 1973. Area H Alternative School (AHAS) was an activist- and hippie-inspired project that became part of a network of alternative schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District. The core philosophy was distinctly andragogic: there was no boundary between students and teachers, no formal curriculum, and no requirements. You could take skateboarding class or Dutch, play baseball all day (as I did) or learn to dance the hustle. Science, math, reading, and writing were also available, but the school had no rules or requirements. Sometimes we had class in outdoor Fuller domes, and our "campus" annually migrated around the city until we acquired a permanent location five years after its founding. Students were expected to decide on their own whether or not to pursue any objective. The natural tendency was to just play. As is the case with several of my peers who went to Waldorf schools, most of us had enriching experiences but we are also somewhat "maladjusted." In other words, we have difficulty fitting into

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mainstream society and tend to have perspectives that are marginalized within our given professions (in my case, education).

I am certain that becoming a freethinking, independent individual is a by-product of such an environment. One of my earliest epiphanies occurred when I was ten and was changing flights in Chicago by myself (my family traveled a lot when I was younger, and sometimes I had to fly alone). I recall watching a man in the concession who could not solve a simple problem. I realized in that moment that just because someone was older, it did not mean he or she was smarter. A year later in 1977, at age 11, I transferred from AHAS to a "normal" public school where my desk, friends, and playtime were assigned to me. I did not take well to the structure the school tried to instill. After being forced to line up and recite the Pledge of Allegiance every morning for a week, I cried and feigned illness in order to go back to my beloved alternative school. But the choice to go to the mainstream public school initially had been mine, and perhaps an early glimpse of reflective thinking that was a by-product of alternative education. At the time I believed that AHAS was hindering me (my best friend was in the normal school and was accelerating at reading and writing) and I desired some systematized education. I was barely literate; my mother ended up teaching me how to read at home. Not surprisingly, at the normal school my new desk-mate had perfect handwriting and wore clean clothes. The insecurity I felt was overwhelming; fitting in within the formal education environment was difficult. Nonetheless, when I returned to the alternative school that same year, I continued to struggle. Though I had a workbook assignment due every Friday, I became a hypochondriac instead of doing the work. That year I faked illness every Friday; the following summer I worried that I would not graduate to the next grade. I had no advisors or supporters in my process; I was isolated and alone. Even though I did pass to the next grade, ultimately I continued the same behavior as before without any input from my elders and teachers. I was free, but silently stressed out.

A key aspect of AHAS was that it was a magnet school, which meant that students were bussed in from different communities to reflect LA's diversity; the fact that we were in LA meant the school was already multicultural. It was also full of colorful teachers and students, which probably was a natural result of progressive-era parents who voluntarily chose to enter their kids into this "kooky" school. In 1980, I opted for a more rigorous four-year preparatory high school, but it had experiential components as well. In addition to being an international school set in a beautiful natural environment (Sedona, Arizona), Verde Valley School emphasized an anthropological curriculum.

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Each year students went on orientation camping trips and participated in two-week project periods where we could explore art, mountaineering, or study esoteric books such as *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (Zukav, 1979) with the math teacher. Most importantly, for a three-week period during the school year we were required to live and work in an unfamiliar environment. My most formidable experiences were living with a Hopi family one year, ski backpacking in Yosemite another year, and working in a convalescent hospital in inner-city Tucson. In 1984, I traveled across country by Greyhound bus to intern at the Appalachian cultural center, Appalshop, in Kentucky during an independent senior-year trip.

More significantly, though, during my high school years in the early 1980s I participated in the most momentous intentional community of my life: punk rock. It was there that I obtained an informal education in underground politics, art, and media production. There was a do-it-yourself/do-it-with-others (DIY/DIW) ethos in our community to actively engage in political discussions and to make our own media (music, magazines, records, radio shows, books, clothes, etc.). Not surprisingly, the environment where I first encountered punks was at the alternative school. To become mediamakers in the punk movement we learned from each other, relying on informal, peer-based educational practices similar to the vision of a *deschooled society* described by Ivan Illich (1971). The experience enabled me to later become a professional mediamaker, empowering me to work in the 1990s as a journalist and multimedia producer throughout my twenties and thirties. In addition to being a mediamaker, during my punk days I was also deeply involved in community activism, energetically participating in anti-war, nuclear disarmament, environmental and solidarity movements.

My undergraduate years were characterized by more educational experimentation. In 1987, at UC Berkeley I entered into the Peace and Conflict Studies program, which was interdisciplinary by design. The department offered only a few core classes; the others were farmed out to the rest of the university based on a student-designed learning plan that culminated with a thesis project. For me, the most important class was the department's required epistemology course, which entailed reading Thomas Kuhn's (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* This led to deconstructing the university's role in the military-industrial complex and its ideological support for the neoliberal project that emerged under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. The interdisciplinary nature of our program enabled me to get the best the university had to offer, while at the same time

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helping me to gain an important counter-perspective on the hegemonic structure of university.

Punk's most important lesson for me was the significance of learner-directed DIY/DIW. Despite having no formal training in media, my experience in the punk movement enabled me to work as a media professional from 1990 through 1999 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I worked in book publishing, film production, and magazine distribution. I also dabbled in freelance magazine writing and newspaper journalism. In addition, I was an early adapter of the world wide web and was part of a pioneering group of web developers working in northern New Mexico. The experience of on-the-job training in media has impacted my career in education, which began in 1999. Through my experience in media, I understood that I learn by doing. As an educator, this applied to the process of learning how to teach, but also as a teaching method. Correspondingly, I realized that process needs theory, which was necessary to flesh out what already had been intuitive experimentation. This correlates with the need to balance *analytic knowing* and *primary knowing*, which I understand as the harmonization of the different cognitive processes of the brain (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005, p. 98). While the left hemisphere is language based and discerns rationally, the right hemisphere perceives patterns and wholeness (McGilchrist, 2009). We need both to function.[1]

When I turned 33 in 1999, my immune system collapsed, which forced me to quit my stressful job as a newspaper arts reporter and to seek out a new path. As part of this process, in 2000 I did the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela by walking 600 miles across northern Spain. Two months of meditative trekking allowed for events and thoughts to present themselves organically. The idea of teaching started as a daydream I was acting out during one of the long and tedious days of hiking across the plains of Castilla-Leon. For whatever reason, I started to rehearse a commencement speech for current graduates of my old high school. I imagined myself at the podium on a beautiful day in May offering tidbits of advice for young graduates as they cast out into their future from the womb of boarding school. The fantasy alternated with my real-life experience as a graduating senior in 1984 standing at that very podium reading a story from the *Tao of Pooh* (Hoff, 1983) about the emperor who kept wanting to transform into something more powerful

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[1] I am aware that new research shows that the brain does not clearly divide tasks between each hemisphere, but the left and right brain metaphor for different styles of cognition is still relevant.

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than himself (such as the sun), only to learn that there was always something else equally as strong (the clouds, wind, or rain). My contemporary self was channeling my old self, but inflecting the story with advice about exploration, seeing the world, taking time off, working new jobs, and exploring identity. The idea of encouraging formal education never entered this imaginary commencement speech. Yet, as the days wore on I thought about the important role of good teachers and how they are just as significant as informal life experience. The thought became stronger and ever present until it was the most obvious thought of all: ditch journalism to become a teacher. It was what all my grandparents did, and suddenly it was the most natural idea that had ever flowed through me. The problem was, when I returned home I did not know where or how to begin. What I did know was that I was more interested in being a mentor than a *teacher*—I wanted to be like one of the many older friends I had in high school who turned me on to strange music, obscure books, and underground art movements.

When I came home from Spain I explored teacher certification through the state of New Mexico, but learned that it involved taking a standardized exam. When I looked at sample tests I was struck by the same kind of panic that had arisen in me when I went to the normal public school: the idea of formal and "official" knowledge did not jibe with my DIY/DIW ethos. So I started with what I knew, which is making media by hand. I offered my services to a local after-school arts program, Warehouse 21 (W21) in Santa Fe, and began working as the supervisor of a teen-published zine. I insisted they write and produce everything; I brought in "old-school" examples for inspiration. In 2001, through a connection at W21 I was offered a consulting job in the Gifted and Talented Program at the Santa Fe Indian School (SFIS), a Native American boarding school in Santa Fe that serves more than 22 tribes. At first the job involved tutoring for writing, but the more time I spent at the school, the more elaborate the projects became. I shared my publishing experience in a yearbook class and also started doing video documentation for school programs. Without having very much video experience other than some classes I took at the community college, I then began teaching video in the same program. Because it was for gifted and talented students, we assessed with portfolios instead of tests. We built the curriculum around student-designed creative projects. I worked with other student-led programs within the school, but most were cut after No Child Left Behind was implemented, because teaching for tests became the priority.

During 2000–2005 I continued to teach in nontraditional educational settings. In 2002, I was trained to use a media literacy methodology developed

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by the New Mexico Media Literacy Project (NMMLP, now called the Media Literacy Project, www.medialiteracyproject.org). NMMLP offered professional development trainings called a Catalyst Institute, which was a four-day intensive workshop for practitioners from different sectors of society, including schoolteachers, health workers, artists, and community activists. The training led to an important revelation: I realized that the power of media could be contested through concrete educational practices. I left the workshop enraptured, convinced that media literacy is an urgently needed toolset with the power to transform society.

In 2002, I also collaborated with NMMLP to develop a Spanish-language media literacy CD-ROM for health (the first of its kind), called *Medios y remedios* (Media and Remedies). The standalone curriculum contained 60 media literacy lessons that linked media with health issues such as smoking, body image, alcohol abuse, and violence. During this time I also came to understand that because media literacy is generally not part of official education standards, many of its practitioners use media literacy in nontraditional educational environments, such as after-school programs, churches, summer camps, and activist settings. I learned that media literacy is applicable to many informal settings and is not necessarily confined to formal education venues.

During my time at the Santa Fe Indian School, I began working intensively with more than eight different tribes in northern New Mexico; I also traveled to give media literacy and video production workshops in Native American communities in Oklahoma, California, Oregon, and Washington State. The ongoing engagement with Native American communities deepened my connection to ecology. Though much of the work was centered on commercial tobacco awareness, I was also working within an alternative epistemology that incorporates sacred ecology into everyday life. While using media literacy techniques to deconstruct commercial tobacco marketing and video production to engage in regenerative community media, I began to see the interconnection between grassroots mediamaking, community health, and the environment. Nonetheless, though I felt intuitively that media literacy was connected to the projects I was working on in Native communities and applicable to ecology, I could not find materials or practitioners who were making similar connections. It was during this period when Mander (1991; 2002) told me that he opposed my efforts to bridge media literacy with ecology on the grounds that media education made media more interesting.

In 2002 at W21, we received a $40,000 grant to run a summer education program to create a peer education project for alcohol prevention through

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media literacy. I hired eight teens who were taught media literacy basics and then was given the space to design a street marketing project and multimedia presentation that they could deliver to younger students at public schools during the following semester. The goal was to teach the students to be peer educators because when it comes to issues like drugs, alcohol, and sex, it is better to have young people communicate the message than adults. (As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, many do not view these kinds of activities as media literacy, but as "advocacy.")

For several years, I continued to lead service-learning projects using video production and media literacy as tools for getting young people to think about how media influenced their attitudes (mainly about health issues such as commercial tobacco and alcohol) and to dialogue with those attitudes through *counter media* that challenged media-generated assumptions. Based on my punk experience, I always wanted students to "get their hands dirty" and to see their own fingerprints in the media. The video projects themselves entailed collaboration, teamwork, and artistic activities through tapping into creativity and play to engender new ideas and ways of thinking about old habits.

In 2004, I embarked upon a distance-learning program to earn a master's degree in Media Studies at the New School for Social Research in New York City. During my master's studies, I discovered that the media studies tradition had very few examples of scholars connecting media with sustainability (it was not until I entered my PhD program in 2008 at Prescott College that I discovered the field of environmental communication). In 2005, after my first year in the master's program, I moved to New York City and began teaching media literacy and grassroots video production to urban youths from a variety of backgrounds, including Afro-Caribbean immigrants, African American gang members from the Bronx, and youths in foster homes. It is important to add that during this period I also became involved with a community of Buddhist practitioners called Dharma Punx. Through this experience "mindfulness" practice became an immeasurable dimension of my learning and teaching. In addition, participating in a community of Buddhist practitioners (called a *sangha*) reinforced Wheatly's (2007, p. 102) notion that, "A primary lesson of life is that nothing living lives alone. Life always and only organizes as systems of interdependence." In a sangha one learns that spiritual practice cannot happen in isolation from daily life, and that mindfulness is both an individual and social activity that necessitates a worldview that sees all relationships as interdependent. Like the Lakota Sioux phrase, "all are related" (*mitakuye oyasin*), the Buddhist perspective is very close to what I experienced when working in Native American communities.

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Simultaneously, as I tried to encourage environmental activists and educators to incorporate media education into their work, I encountered a great deal of hostility. I learned from personal experience that most media literacy and environmental educators agreed with each other that there was little connection between their respective disciplines. And even though environmental educators use media to communicate with the world, there is little indication that media is seen as an integral aspect of environmental pedagogy. Consequently, as a practitioner wanting to combine these different perspectives, I realized that I would have to design a new approach that could bridge these various areas of inquiry, the features of which are explored in Chapter 6 where I describe my model of ecomedia literacy. Part of this process led me to publish a series of essays targeting my community of media literacy educators (López, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2013). This community consists of diverse practitioners with varying methods but, in general, shares a common disconnection with sustainability issues. By publishing my articles and accepting presentation proposals, several editors and conference organizers have demonstrated openness to these views; nonetheless I have encountered very little dialogue about how and why media education needs to be greened. For example, in 2011, I presented on media education and sustainability at the Media Education Summit in London. Only four people attended my talk, whereas in the adjacent room a presentation about Facebook drew an audience of more than 100. The few who did attend my presentation commented that it never occurred to them that media were connected to environmental issues. I suspect this lack of awareness partially accounted for a dearth of interest in my talk. It may also be that because Facebook was a trendy topic, it attracted a larger audience. Likewise, as stated above, I had a similar experience at the Media & Learning conference in Brussels in 2012. Understanding these responses is part of the puzzle this book tries to solve.

Meanwhile, I have attempted to incorporate a green perspective into my work as a professor of media studies in an undergraduate university environment. Since 2008, I have been working with college students on a daily basis teaching media studies courses such as Media, Culture and Society; Digital Media Culture; Advanced Media Theory; Media and Gender; Media and the Environment; Intercultural Communication; and Media Ethics. As I observe with my students, it is increasingly clear that online media and personal media gadgets are a ubiquitous part of everyday life, yet they also remain unexamined in the context of global ecology. In 2011, I prototyped the ecomedia literacy curriculum in my Digital Media Culture class (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6). This confirmed my suspicion that students

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initially do not make the link between media usage and sustainability, but once their attention is drawn to the subject they become aware and interested in the connection. During the course, students examined their personal media gadgets using a systems framework that connected personal media use with global ecology.

Significantly, gadget use and social networks are increasingly more relevant to student lives than what is actually learned within traditional classrooms (Gutiérrez-Martín & Tyner, 2012). The disconnection between formal education and our progressively mediated life experience has led many experts to challenge standard educational methods (RSA, 2010), media studies, and traditional media literacy practices (Bennett, Kendall, & McDougall, 2011; Kendall & McDougall, 2012). In particular, several rebel educators who also share a background in DIY/DIW punk communities have begun to subvert and question standard educational practices, calling themselves *edupunks* (Kamenetz, 2010). I feel an affinity with edupunks and draw inspiration from their experimental efforts to push the medium of education as a kind of DIY/DIW media. Much of their alternative educational practices incorporate participatory media tools, drawing inspiration from the self-organizing and deschooled character of lifelong and informal learning encouraged by everyday digital media usage. Nonetheless, though I am impressed and heartened by many of the new media education practices emerging on the internet (which are discussed in Chapter 3), I am also concerned about the disconnection between their pedagogical potential and the lack of discourse concerning their relationship with sustainability. Though there is a great deal of discussion and innovation around bringing new media practices into traditional educational settings, these proposals and efforts generally lack a green perspective.

All of these experiences have led me to conclude that media literacy and sustainability education can and should be combined into a pedagogical framework. Additionally, these experiences have also led to several biases. First, I believe in experiential education and favor informal educational environments. Second, I feel that education should revolve around communities of practice that involve peer and lifelong learning. Third, I distrust the education system and look for inspiration from outside official educational practices. Fourth, I understand that interdisciplinary education is essential. Furthermore, I also believe the role of education is related to "cultural work," which is to say that whether conscious or not, our methods and intentions propose and encourage certain ways of engaging the world. I take this position based on Walter Benjamin's (1970) concept of *author as*

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producer, which was an argument that cultural producers such as professional writers should be conscious of whether or not they engage their crafts as part of a larger project of criticism and political activism. In Benjamin's time, cultural work was primarily seen as a politically progressive activity as distinguished from the kinds of production for profit in which culture industries engaged. Similarly, Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci, Hoare, & Smith, 2005) developed the idea of the *organic intellectual*, which is the concept that the ruling class produces native intellectuals who reproduce the interests of their class. He theorized working-class intellectuals could advance the cause of worker rights and revolution. Combining the insights of Benjamin and Gramsci, I believe that I am a cultural worker and organic intellectual rooted in both media literacy and sustainability education.

Epistemology

Action research pioneers Greenwood and Levin (2007) assert that in social sciences there are two general research frameworks: logical positivism and hermeneutics. Logical positivism views the world as an objectively given reality and that objective research methods can reveal truth. In contrast, I subscribe to the alternative research tradition of hermeneutics, which "is based on the ontological position that the world is only available subjectively and the epistemological project is to negotiate interpretations of this subjective world" (p. 56). In addition to hermeneutics, Heron and Reason (2006) propose that in order to encompass different ways of knowing, researchers can draw from an extended epistemology, which is knowledge that reaches beyond traditional academic theories. These extended epistemologies include experiential knowing (immediacy), presentational knowing (performance), propositional knowing (about), and practical knowing (how to) (Heron & Reason, 2006).

Given that an ecological perspective is by nature multifaceted, it is important to acknowledge that complexity is also part of my extended epistemology. Thus, my orientation is hermeneutic in combination with extended epistemologies that encompass complexity. This means "not everything in reality is socially constructed, and social constructions and conversations are not floating in an ocean of chaos…but are embedded/entangled with attractors, i.e., intervening variables at physical, chemical, biological and ecological levels of reality" (Kagan, 2011, p. 20). Subsequently, my inquiry process included meditations in nature, testing ideas in classrooms, traveling internationally to engage practitioners at conferences, walking though the streets of Rome, conversing in online social networks,

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gardening, worrying about the future of my children, absorbing cross-cultural encounters from past educational experiences, struggling with colleagues, and using art for inspiration.

In my effort to be true to mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), in the process of writing I intended to be honest, forthright, and authentic, attempting full disclosure whenever possible and to be mindful of what drives my own questions and definitions. Furthermore, my ecological perspective is intertwined with Buddhist practice and the experience of living and working in Native American communities. I tried to be faithful to the best of my abilities to the spirit of academic research while being true to the various strands that make up the web of perspectives that comprise this book, which ultimately is an act of media creation.

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