

Reading the “News” and Reading the “World” in High School Social Studies Classrooms

by Alan Singer and Michael Pezone

Michael Pezone and Alan Singer have had a ten year collaboration as teachers, researchers and authors. Singer is a former New York City high school social studies teacher who is now a teacher educator at Hofstra University. Pezone, seeking a second career as a teacher while in his mid-thirties, was a student in the Hofstra program. He is currently a social studies teacher at Campus Magnet High School in Queens, New York and an adjunct and cooperating teacher at Hofstra. Singer and Pezone share a commitment to critically interrogating the print media in high school classes to help students develop essential questions about society while also identifying underlying biases in coverage that shape our perception of the world. A major part of their pedagogy is nurturing “doubt,” a healthy skepticism about received truths in social studies classrooms. In order to do this, they focus on developing the critical literacy of students - teaching students how to think, organize ideas and express them. Paulo Friere argues that literacy should not be viewed as a technical skill, but as a necessary action for freedom (Freire & Machedo, 1987). According to Freire, critical literacy requires reading and understanding both the *world* and the *word* so that people have the ability to use words to change the world. He feels that interest in and the ability to “read the world” naturally precedes the ability to “read the word.” Based on his perspective, in order to enhance traditional “pen and paper” literacy, teachers must engage students as activists.

Pezone and Singer frequently start the school year by using newspapers to help secondary school students identify their own questions about world events. They distribute newspapers and news magazines to teams of students and ask them to select articles they believed report on important issues facing the United States in the contemporary world. Teams write down the headlines of the articles and their reasons for selecting them on poster paper. At the end of the class period, at least one group reports to the class on their deliberations (Singer, 2003; Singer & Murphy, 2001).

The next day, the rest of the groups report. After the presentations, students categorize the issues, identify underlying problems raised by the news articles, and discuss questions they wanted to answer during the year. Articles on racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and police brutality have led to questions such as, “Can the United States become a more just society?” Topics like welfare reform, health care, unemployment, tax breaks, and crime promoted students to ask, “What is the responsibility (or job) of government?” Other questions developed by students have included, “Should the United States be the world’s police force?”, and “Is technology making the world a better place?” These essential questions are printed on poster boards and hung prominently around the room. During the course of the school year student generated questions, especially about social justice and the responsibility of government, lead to

other “big” questions, and provided a focus for studying about the past, understanding the present, and deciding how to engage the future.

In the next section of this essay, “Where I Come From”, Alan Singer describes the origins of his view of media in his experience as a youthful activist and his approach to teaching social studies. This is followed by a discussion by Michael Pezone of his view that “Knowledge Construction is a Radical Enterprise.” In the final section of the essay, Singer and Pezone describe and evaluate a lesson in one of Pezone’s high school classes where they put their experience and ideas into practice and involve students in applying a critical lens to the media as they read the “News” and read the “World” at Campus Magnet High School.

Alan Singer describes “Where I Come From”

As a child in the 1950s, I was taught at home and in school to believe in the veracity of the leaders of the United States. As a teenager in the early 1960s, I learned from my teachers and parents that *The New York Times* accurately provided readers with “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” However, my confidence in teachers, government and media began to deteriorate during the War in Vietnam. The real blow to my trust occurred in December, 1967 during my freshman year in college.

On Tuesday, December 5 and Wednesday, December 6, I joined thousands of protesters in lower Manhattan in demonstrations against the war and the draft. My decision to participate in “Stop the Draft” week was a very contentious one in my family. My parents strongly objected, so I had to sneak out of the house before my father got up to go to work in the morning. My father told me that if I was arrested, I shouldn’t call him because he would not bail me out. The first day there were symbolic arrests at the Whitehall Street Draft Center but I was not involved. I left early to go to classes at the City College of New York and to distribute leaflets encouraging students to join marchers the next day.

I remember that when I arrived at Battery Park before dawn on Wednesday morning it was very cold and I was shivering. A small group of demonstrators, nearly all college students, gathered and waited for someone to give us some direction. Mostly we were frightened. There were barricades all over and the police’s Tactical Patrol Force, armed with guns and nightsticks, mounted on horses, and wearing helmets and body armor, loomed over us. I held a hand-made sign, “The Draft Violates the 13th Amendment.” I was supposed to meet two friends from school but was unable to find them.

At some point the group moved into the street and the next thing I know the mounted police launched a cavalry charge. In my memories, the horses were galloping but I can’t attest to it. As the horses and riders maneuvered into the middle of the crowd, the officers began flailing out with their sticks trying to do as much damage to the demonstrators as possible. It was a police riot and the students broke and ran. I think I ran for hours.

As we escaped, we shouted anti-war slogans and blocked rush-hour traffic. I was with a group that headed uptown, but the mounted police force caught up with us about a half-mile away at Canal Street. When they turned their horses into the crowd, we scattered. I remember that there seemed to be some sense of order after that. We continued marching north in the street, blocking traffic, past 42nd Street. Drivers and construction workers cursed at us. Someone recommended that we head toward the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on Park Avenue and Fiftieth Street where Secretary of State Dean Rusk would be speaking.

I was with a small group of a couple of dozen people when mounted police burst out of the doors of St. Bartholomew's Church on Park Avenue and attacked us again. We hustled to the hotel where we were penned in behind barricades but allowed to set up a picket line. At this point I met one of my friends for the first time that day. As we walked on the side of the hotel we were pelted with construction debris from a site across the street. I went up to a police officer (I was admittedly a bit naïve) and asked him to do something about the construction workers before one of us was hurt.

I was promptly arrested, handcuffed, thrown into a police car with two other protesters, and there we were beaten by two police officers with nightsticks. One of the protesters in the car actually wrestled a nightstick away from one of the officers. When the other police officer drew a gun, the protester agreed to surrender the nightstick if the police stopped hitting us. As I said, I was frightened before. Now I was terrified.

That afternoon I was processed through the courts. We were charged with "obstructing pedestrian traffic," which meant that we were accused of standing on the sidewalk. Everyone else was released on their own recognizance, but because I was under age eighteen, I had to wait for my mother to come and get me. My father made me swear not to tell anyone about my escapade, but one of my aunts saw me being arrested on television and a photograph of the arrest made the front page of the City College newspaper. I had to appear in court three times during the next six months but eventually all charges were dropped. As an interesting side note, when I applied for a license as a New York City taxi cab driver, they held up authorization for six months because of the arrest. However, it had no impact on my ability to become a teacher.

The main point of this story is really my reaction to the next day's *New York Times*. The demonstration made the front-page with the headline "Police Turn Back War Protesters." The opening line was that "Antidraft protesters clashing with the police in the second day of massive demonstrations over the Vietnam war were thrown back again yesterday in attempts to paralyze the armed forces induction center at 39 Whitehall Street."

Later in the article, the *Times* declared "The aim to close the induction center was defeated, and the result of these sorties in the financial district and of later weaker demonstrations . . . was an occasional tieup of traffic, some minor scuffling, 40 arrests and dissension among leaders of the coalition sponsoring

the protest.” Much of the article poked fun at the ineffectiveness of the demonstrators, nearly all college students, who turned out in such poor numbers, had gotten lost on their way to the draft induction center, and were largely “docile.”

Although the article did acknowledge that “At Canal Street they [the demonstrators] were temporarily routed by eight mounted policemen,” the repeated attacks by armed and mounted police on peaceful demonstrators who they outnumbered by as much as two to one, had apparently never happened. The dumping of debris from elevated construction sites had also never happened. And in the last paragraph of the article I learned that the demonstrator who had grabbed the nightstick from the police officer and spared us an extended beating while we were in the police car had been charged with felonious assault and held in jail.

The New York Times, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, had gotten the story all wrong. I didn’t know what to do or to think.

During the next three years of college I attended countless demonstrations. Some were reported on in the media and some were not. However, there was one constant. The media always seemed to get it wrong. Blinded by the assumption that the police and government officials were telling the truth, they either never saw or chose not to report what was actually happening. It took many years and much political organizing until the police, politicians and the media accepted that in order to have organized and peaceful political protests they had to respect first amendment rights, cooperate with leaders in the planning of demonstrations and assist, rather than disrupt, marches and rallies. It wasn’t until large numbers of middle-class parents joined the protests and *The New York Times* itself was targeted by the Nixon Administration in the Pentagon papers case and during Watergate, that the veil that blinded the press began to be lifted.

My experience as a political activist made it possible for me to become skeptical about the media, government officials and received truth in general. As a social studies teacher and teacher educator, one of my primary goals is to have students develop a similar healthy skepticism about the pronouncements of people in authority (without them having to experience the same personal trauma) and the desire to raise questions, find answers, and search for, formulate and test out underlying explanations. I routinely worked “doubt” into historical document analysis and current events lessons. We tried to figure out why President McKinley justified the annexation of the Philippines at a press conference by claiming that God wanted America to Christianize Filipinos (perhaps God did not know that most were already Christian) and how the United States State Department knew the date and time of the Panamanian “Revolution” in 1901 before it even happened. One of my biggest heroes is Abraham Lincoln, who in 1846 torpedoed (temporarily) his political career by demanding that President Polk, who wanted a war with Mexico, show

Congress the spot on the map where American blood was supposedly shed on American soil by Mexican troops.

I have been fortunate to work with a number of teachers who appreciate the need to question media coverage and its underlying assumptions. As the United States prepared for and attempted to justify an invasion of Iraq in the Spring of 2003, I was invited by alumni of my teacher education program to present an alternative view to classes in six public middle and high schools. Unlike the media, I always began by acknowledging that I have a point of view. And unlike U.S. government officials, I welcomed questions, comments and open challenges to my ideas by both students and teachers. I usually focused on my questions about Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation of the "evidence" to the United Nations about Iraq's support for terrorism and its weapons of mass destruction. Most students believed that Iraq had something to do with the attack on the United States on 9/11/01, even though the FBI and CIA declared there was no evidence of a connection. Part of the problem was that the media buried coverage of the disclaimers. *The New York Times* ran a 146-word article on the bottom of page A12 (2002).

I had the most fun discussing the satellite photographs presented by Powell at the United Nations (Miller & Preston, 2003: A10). One photo supposedly showed weapons of mass destruction being loaded onto truck beds. My question was, "If we have pictures of the Iraqis loading the trucks, where are the pictures of the trucks being unloaded?" As far as I could discover, the media, committed to the idea that Powell was telling the truth, never asked the question. Finally, on May 26, 2004, *The New York Times* issued a formal apology to its readers for its uncritical coverage of claims made by the Bush Administration to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Michael Pezone believes that "Knowledge Construction is a Radical Enterprise"

I believes that a teacher of social studies is obligated to construct lessons in which students compare and analyze conflicting viewpoints. This obligation ultimately derives from basic philosophical conditions of knowing. If one accepts, for instance, a definition of knowledge as "justified true belief," the first term of the definition demands exhaustive and systematic consideration of possible explanations. Such a pedagogical approach is necessarily a radical enterprise, one that requires constant interrogation of accepted texts, including textbooks, standardized testing material, and dominant media. A teacher who ignores this obligation, and uncritically presents an accepted canon, is, in essence, nothing other than a propagandist.

Prevailing pedagogical practices are, with their overarching emphasis on teaching to the test and reliance on textbook knowledge, inhospitable to a critical approach. The fact that teachers are often overwhelmed with teaching requirements, and function in school environments that do not provide the

opportunity for collaborative sharing of ideas and resources, represent additional barriers to a genuinely critical pedagogy. When one considers, for example, the breadth of material encompassed within the Global History curriculum, it is not surprising that many teachers depend, in isolation, on textbook summaries for basic information, and thus accept textbook framing of issues and events.

The result of this is that students are presented a sanitized official version of the past that they are expected to accept uncritically. This official version becomes so embedded in the way we think that it takes on the status of received truth. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994: 90), Edward Said explored the power and scope of the dominant ideas of capitalist industrial society. His study of 19th century European and American literature showed the ideas justifying European imperialism and global conquest were deeply embedded in the culture and shaped the world views of leading writers and thinkers, including John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin, and Joseph Conrad.

The dominant universe of discourse within the United States today is characterized and defined by the essentially total control of major media outlets by giant corporations (Chomsky, 1993; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Bagdikian, 1997). To a large degree, the ideological positions of students and teachers alike are constructed and reinforced within the limited and limiting horizons of this dominant universe. There is no easy solution to the problems suggested above; no easy answer to the question, “how can a critical pedagogical approach become the norm?” A radical rethinking and restructuring of pedagogy will not occur as a result of pedagogical initiatives alone, but will depend on transformation of U.S. society at large. Although school and universities will not and cannot be the prime engine of such societal transformation, they can be arenas of crucial ideological movement. In this regard, progressive, critical educators must commit to a praxis that involves: 1) a pedagogy characterized by fundamental criticism of accepted assumptions and beliefs, both about history, contemporary society, and pedagogy itself; 2) collaborative sharing of pedagogical materials and ideas—the creation of a community of educators committed to transformative practice; and 3) breaking free of reliance upon dominant media, which requires investigation, sharing, and use of alternative sources of information in classrooms.

Ideal teachers are a political prisoner who resist bondage by continuing to educate themselves and others. They teach for one reason only: to create a world of equality and freedom. My role model as a teacher is Prometheus as described in classical Greek mythology. Prometheus was “the teacher of all arts and the giver of all good to mortal men,” who, as a result of his transgression, was severely and eternally punished by Zeus. When Zeus offered him freedom in exchange for betraying mankind, Prometheus responded, “There is no torment or contrivance in the power of Zeus to wring this utterance from me. . . ; none of these things shall extort from me the knowledge that may ward off his overthrow.” I believe teaching can be an act of resistance to an oppressive social order.

As a teacher-activist, I am committed to working with students from racial and ethnic minorities and working-class and poor communities. One of my goals is to empower them to read the word and the world (Freire & Machado, 1987) so they can become active citizens engaged intellectually and politically in challenging hegemonic dominance and become leaders in their communities in struggles to transform society (Casey, 1993: 160-163; Gramsci, 1980: 330-333).

Reading the “News” and Reading the “World” at Campus Magnet High School

Campus Magnet High School is located in a working-class community in Queens, New York, one of New York City’s outlying boroughs. The school is a few minutes from JFK International Airport. Although it is less than a mile from the highway that serves as a border with the city’s largely White suburbs, the students in Pezone’s classes are overwhelmingly Black and Latino. A majority of them have parents who immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean. The graduation rate from the school is only 56% (DOE, 2004).

In New York City, most high school classes are reorganized in September and February. This lesson was conducted in a United States history elective class at the start of the third month of the spring semester. Students were in the 10th and 11th grade. During the period, instruction was full class and group. When students entered the room, the class discussed how you can get information from a newspaper story and picture and whether there were also underlying messages and views being presented to readers; messages and views that are virtually “unconscious,” assumed by everyone to be true, and accepted without question (Foucault, 1971: xi).

Next, working in groups, students were asked to examine a picture, with a caption and article headline from that morning’s *New York Times* (April 1, 2004). They had to:

1. Make a list of things you see in the picture.
2. Write a paragraph describing what you see in the picture.
3. What story is being told by the picture, caption and headline?
4. What problems or questions do you have with this “story”?

Groups were given different pictures to examine. That morning, the World Business section (W1) showed a color photograph of someone working in a field surrounded by bright red chilies. The headline was, “India’s Economy Soared by 10% in Last Quarter of 2003.” The caption read, “Growth in agricultural production, like these red chilies harvested on a farm near the western Indian city of Ahmedabad, led an economic surge last year. Farm output was aided by a heavy monsoon season.”

The front page (A1) showed a picture of a bridge. Three burned bodies are visible hanging from the trestles. A crowd of about ten men appear to be celebrating. The headline was, “4 From U.S. Killed in

Ambush in Iraq; Mob Drags Bodies.” The caption read, “Iraqis chant anti-American slogans in Falluja yesterday as burned bodies of Americans were suspended on a bridge over the Euphrates River.”

This article continued on page A12 where two other pictures showed three men celebrating in front of a burning truck while holding up a sign and a group of approximately a dozen teenage boys shouting with arms raised over the ashes of a burned body. The headline was, “4 From U.S. Killed in Ambush in Iraq; Mob Drags Bodies.” The caption reads, “Top, a leaflet with the phrase ‘Falluja, the cemetery of Americans,’ was held up yesterday near a burning vehicle in Falluja. Iraq. Above, children cheered while bodies burned after an attack on American civilians working for Blackwater Security Consulting of Moyock, N.C.”

While students worked in their groups, Michael Pezone and Alan Singer circulated around the room, asked follow-up questions and took turns videotaping the conversations. Team teaching and the videotaping of student conversations are ways we use to observe what students are saying and learning and to reflect on our teaching practice.

Group 1 had four students (Student names have been changed; statements have been minimally edited for grammar). They examined the photograph about India and brainstormed about what they were seeing. In a typical go-around, students focused on the images in the picture and information reported in the headline and caption. While they drew connections with prior knowledge, they initially refrained from making judgements about any underlying message in the photograph or text. For example:

Alexis: That’s a lot of red chilies.

Anna: A lot of red chilies; its abundance. It was caused by the heavy monsoon season, rainstorms.

Shaniqua: It’s about the growth of agriculture in India.

Steven: India’s economy grew by 10.4%?

Alexis: It I think it has overproduced.

After more than five minutes of discussion, however, one of the students had a crucial insight that stimulated a much more open-ended conversation.

Alexis: This is child labor. In this picture, that child working on the farm is child labor.

Shaniqua: I’m saying that it’s not child labor because he’s helping out on his family’s farm. How do you decide if that’s child labor?

Steven: This is in India and it looks like a boy surrounded by pounds of chili because they’re economy is growing 10% a year. Half of us basically think its child labor and the other half don’t believe its child labor. So that’s what we’re arguing about, whether or not its child labor.

Shaniqua: I think that it's not child labor if you're working your family's farm. Calling it child labor is a false statement and you could mess up somebody by saying that. If you work on a farm and you are doing chores like you would do in your house, it's not the same thing.

Alexis: How do you know it's his farm? Is he getting paid?

Anna: The problem with the newspaper article is they don't tell you all that so we don't know the answers. It never says.

Alexis: If a child in New York in the middle of Manhattan is surrounded by pounds of chili peppers, what you think is going to happen? Don't you think they are going to call child welfare?

Shaniqua: But this is a different culture. People have different cultures, so you can't just decide something. To him, these are his chores. Like down south, you work on your farm, you're supposed to help your family work. You cannot say it's child labor. That's false.

Steven: Anybody ever handle chili peppers when you cook? What's it like to handle a chili pepper? It's hot. It burns. What happens to your throat if you work with a lot of chili peppers?

Anna: The spores from the chili get into your throat and it burns. You start to cough and gasp. Your eyes burn, water, tear. If you rub your face you get a lot of burning.

Alexis: That's my point and why I call it child labor. If you want to get technical and in the law and all that it is child labor.

Alan: Let me interrupt for a second, because what you're all arguing about is exactly the point of this lesson. I need someone from the group to read the headline, the caption, and the first paragraph. Why don't you do it, Shaniqua? What does the headline say?

Shaniqua: India's economy soars by 10.4% in the final quarter of 2003.

Alan: And what does the caption say?

Shaniqua: Growth and agriculture production like these red chilies harvested on a farm in the West Indian city of Amid Baz.

Alan: Someone read the first paragraph of the article.

Steven: India, March 31. India's economy soars 10.4 percent in the final quarter of 2003 making it one of the fastest growing in the world, even ahead of China.

Alan: What do you notice about this story?

Steven: The economy is soaring. It's the fastest soaring economy in the world. But they never tell us about the boy.

Alan: Why don't they tell us about him?

Steven: Because that's not what they worried about. They're not worried about the boy. They're worried about the economy.

Alexis: . . . and money-making

Alan: This is what we mean by critical reading. If you just look at the article, you say this is a great thing. They're making all this money. But if you stop to look at the photograph carefully, what kinds of issues begin to emerge in your head?

Alexis: Child labor.

Group 2 had four students. They examined the front page photograph of the bodies suspended from the bridge in Iraq. Members of the group had a visceral reaction to what they saw and were angry with the perpetrators of what they called a "dehumanizing" act. Their anger at the act and image dominated discussion and they were unable to move past it to discuss the possible intent of the newspaper in printing the image.

Stacy: People are really happy that they killed all these people and they're burning and hung them on the bridge.

Roberto: Well, I see there are bodies hanging by a river and these people are really happy of what they just committed.

Tamika: It's degrading and dehumanizing, that's it. Why do you do this? Aren't you supposed to bury bodies instead of burning them and hanging them on the bridge?

Carlos: Because they don't want the Americans in their country.

Tamika: They're anti-Americans.

Stacy: They're heartless, because why would you kill someone just because they're from a different culture.

Tamika: That they're taking joy in taking other people lives. I don't think it's fair, I don't think it's right.

Roberto: They are taking others' lives and I just think that's wrong. It doesn't matter what you are, who you are.

Tamika: They're just dehumanizing.

In group 3, Alan Singer joined the conversation, asking questions about the photograph and the message it was presenting to readers. This group examined the photograph captioned: "Above, children cheered while bodies burned after an attack on American civilians working for Blackwater Security Consulting of Moyock, N.C." His questioning started to help the conversation move beyond description towards analysis.

Monica: They're rejoicing. The Iraq people. It makes them feel like they won the battle, the war.

Victor: They burned bodies and they're rejoicing. They just feel that they interfere against America's agenda.

Alan: Can you imagine people burning bodies and rejoicing? What is the message to us? What does the photo say to you about these people?

Laurence: They don't care.

Tinetta: They believe their victims don't deserve to be alive.

Alan: What do you think about these people rejoicing over burned bodies?

Tinetta: They're a danger.

Victor: They got problems.

Alan: Look at these people. I want you to describe those people who are jumping up and down.

Monica: They're kids.

Alan: Excuse me.

Monica: They're kids.

Alan: How old do you think they are?

Monica: Like about 10 to 18? Maybe younger.

Alan: Yes, some of them are your age. Here you have young men your age, celebrating at the death of others. What is the message of this picture about Iraq?

Laurence: That they're having kids, you know, our age and they're engaging in war.

Alan: But is this war?

Victor: No, it's not war. It's like they are teaching their kids violence at some early age.

Laurence: I wouldn't say they're teaching it, but it's like they allow it. They're allowing it.

Alan: What would you say about a society that allows kids to be violent like that at an early age?

Tinetta: It's showing them how to become more powerful when they grow up.

Alan: What does the photograph say about this society?

Monica: Parents don't care.

Tinetta: It's their culture. They want this. They want this.

Alan: Well, what does this say about their culture and religion?

Victor: Their religion is Islam. It's crazy.

Alan: You think it's just crazy? You think these people are just crazy?

Victor: It's that they don't care. They're on a different level. They don't care about life. They're showing them how to be terrorists.

Alan: Do you think this is a culture that doesn't care about life and is training its children to be terrorists or is that the message the newspaper wants us to take from this photograph?

After groups finished their discussions, students presented their findings to the full class and everyone discussed the reports. Michael Pezone asked: "What is the message to the American people in the pictures about Iraq? What words do they want to come into our minds when we see these pictures?"

Roy: The Iraqis are saying “Americans stay out”.

Yvonne: Terrorism. They’re teaching the young kids to become terrorists.

Patrick: They’re not afraid to die.

Christina: They’re evil. Iraq and Islam are evil. They’re terrorists. They’re not afraid to die.

Mike: Is this a true report about these people? Are they unafraid to die? Are they that different from us?

Laurence: I’m not afraid to die, but I am scared of death.

Alexis: We aren’t evil. We’re not terrorists.

Mike: Are we that much different from them as human beings?

Shaniqua: That’s what the pictures and articles make it seem like. That’s what they are telling us.

Mike: What do you think?

Tinetta: Maybe they aren’t crazy. Maybe they are willing to die for their country, for a cause.

Mike: What do we call someone who is prepared to die for a country or cause?

Tinetta: Patriotic.

Mike: Are these people crazy terrorists or are they patriots?

Anna: In the eyes of Americans, they’re terrorists, but in their eyes, they’re patriotic. Americans tend to forget is that we are not the only ones that are patriotic and love our country, are willing to die for our country. Other people feel the same way about their country. You know what I mean? For them it’s patriotic.

Victor: They feel like they had some kind of victory over the Americans.

Theodora: They act like Americans tried to invade their country and take it over.

Mike: When we first look at the picture, they come across as inhuman, but as we begin to discuss the picture, what begins to come out about these people?

Lisette: That they have a purpose.

Tamika: I still think it’s degrading hanging bodies on the bridge.

Dominique: If people with armies and bombs came and destroyed here and then tried to take over here, our reaction would be just like theirs.

Lisette: We’d have to send a message back to the invader, a strong message.

Conclusions

John Dewey (1933) believed that human beings have “an innate disposition to draw inferences, an inherent desire to experiment and test. The mind. . . entertains suggestions, tests them by observation of objects and events, reaches conclusions, tries them in action, finds them confirmed or in need of correction or rejection” (9). In our experience, what Dewey called an *innate disposition* is better understood as a *potential*. Human beings have the capacity to reevaluate, draw connections, and learn, but

that does not mean they always engage in reflective practice or critical thinking. It is a capacity that must be nurtured by teachers, especially in a world where government propaganda, supported by the corporate media, powerfully influence the way we think.

In these conversations, students tended to approach the analysis of the photographs as a classroom exercise, rather than as something of importance to their lives. Even as they performed the assigned tasks conscientiously, they resisted going beyond a superficial level of analysis until pressed through teacher questioning. However, sometimes as a result of the insight of one of their peers and sometimes as a result of prodding by teachers, they did begin to question the “truths” presented by these media images.

We believe the willingness of secondary school students to accept what they see or read in the media at face value possesses a significant threat to democratic values and institutions in the United States, especially as the media grows more consolidated and sophisticated in the construction and manipulation of images. This places a great responsibility on teachers to promote critical literacy and nurture “doubt” as they teach their students to read both the “News” and the “World.”

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