

**Teleliteracy in the neighborhood:
Seeking an educative pedagogical framework and
finding an encoded praxis of mutual humanization in
“Mister Rogers Talks about Learning”**

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Literacy education today involves more than the development of reading and writing proficiencies; literacy today also requires the augmentation of skills needed to read many forms of audiovisual text. Finding a conceptual framework for all of the different kinds of media in which people engage today, however, presents a daunting challenge to the field; seeking and finding this conceptual framework seems urgent considering that young people especially tend to draw heavily from popular music, television, film, and internet sites in their struggles to understand themselves and their world. This study focuses specifically on teleliteracy education. While good teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks exist, significant advancements in teleliteracy education seem to be mired in problems. Most notably, members of the field debate the value of engaging young people in controversial television content. Some scholars claim that this engagement “dumbs-down” learning and diminishes life; others claim that it promotes learning and enriches life when the engagement occurs in democratic learning spaces. Another problem is that existing teleliteracy frameworks seem to concentrate on helping learners to become more critically minded but perhaps overly cynical of the television content in which they engage. In an attempt to strengthen existing teleliteracy frameworks, this study presents an analysis of

“Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), a theme of the Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood series comprised of five one-half hour programs. In the study, the author critiques Rogers’ work through a theoretical framework that merges Dewey’s (1938) and Freire’s (1993/1970) philosophies of what constitutes an educative experience within a mutually humanizing praxis. The author also employs Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) articulation of constructivist inquiry as a theoretical framework for his methodology, drawing from Freire’s (1993/1970) ideas on deconstructing a coded situation and Carby’s (1993) work on decoding media text that has pedagogic intent and didactic tone. From the analysis, the author suggests that Rogers’ educative and humanizing pedagogy provides insights on how young people might be invited to integrate their learning experiences into their everyday lives in order to navigate positively and confidently, but not cynically, the popular media in which they engage more broadly the challenging issues of a growingly complex world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	X
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM UNDER STUDY	3
1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	10
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDING THE STUDY	11
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	12
1.5 GENERAL RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTION OF “MISTER ROGERS TALKS ABOUT LEARNING” AS THE TEXT UNDER STUDY	14
1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY	15
1.7 OVERVIEW OF INSIGHTS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY	19
1.8 ROADMAP OF THE DISSERTATION	20
2.0 METHODOLOGY.....	25
2.1 PROCEDURES FOR DATA ANALYSIS.....	30
2.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	34
2.3 SUBJECTIVITIES BROUGHT TO THE STUDY	36
3.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	40

3.1	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TEACHING AND LEARNING AS HUMANIZING AND EDUCATIVE, A THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE WRITINGS OF DEWEY AND FREIRE.....	40
3.2	LEARNING IS ACTIVE, DYNAMIC AND ONGOING	42
3.3	TRUE TEACHING IS STEERING STUDENT GROWTH BY PROBLEM-POSING WITH THEM, NOT BANKING KNOWLEDGE IN THEM.....	43
3.4	EDUCATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES CULTIVATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND A “STOP AND THINK” ATTITUDE TOWARD DECISION-MAKING.....	47
3.5	ESTABLISHING EXISTING TELELITERACY PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS WITHIN THE THEORETICAL FRAME	48
3.6	ESTABLISHING MISTER ROGERS’ PEDAGOGY THROUGH THE THEORETICAL LENS OF DEWEY AND FREIRE	52
4.0	PRECIS AND OVERVIEW.....	63
4.1	PRÉCIS OF MISTER ROGERS’ NEIGHBORHOOD.....	63
4.2	OVERVIEW OF “MISTER ROGERS TALKS ABOUT LEARNING”	68
5.0	AN EDUCATIVE PEDAGOGY OF DEMOCRATIC LEARNING AND MUTUAL TRUST IN A SAFE AND CARING SPACE.....	78
5.1	MAKING A SPACE THAT BELONGS BOTH TO MISTER ROGERS AND THE VIEWERS CREATES A SAFE AND PREDICTABLE LEARNING SANCTUARY.....	79
5.2	ATTENDING TO THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE VIEWERS CULTIVATES MUTUAL TRUST.....	85

5.3	FACILITATING DEMOCRATIC LEARNING FOSTERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECOGNIZING CREATIVITY IN SELF AND OTHERS	90
6.0	AN EDUCATIVE PEDAGOGY OF EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS AND “BECOMING” AWARENESS OF SELF AND OTHERS BASED ON PROBLEM-POSING RATHER THAN BANKED LEARNING	100
6.1	PROBLEM-POSING EDUCATION OVER BANKED LEARNING FACILITATES EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF MAKE-BELIEVE	102
6.2	DIALOGUING WITH SPECIAL VISITORS TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD FACILITATES EDUCATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR VIEWERS	110
6.3	ELICITING REFLECTION THROUGH SONG LYRIC IS PART OF THE PRAXIS OF MUTUAL HUMANIZATION	115
7.0	AN EDUCATIVE PEDAGOGY OF SILENCE, LISTENING, HUMILITY, AND OTHER VIRTUES AND VIRTUOUS PRACTICES IN A “STOP AND THINK” LEARNING CULTURE	121
7.1	SILENCE IS PART OF A “STOP-AND-THINK” LEARNING CULTURE	123
7.2	LISTENING IS PART OF A STOP-AND-THINK LEARNING CULTURE	125
7.3	HUMILITY IS PART OF A STOP-AND-THINK LEARNING CULTURE	127
7.4	MISTER ROGERS’ “STOP-AND-THINK” CULTURE IS ON THE SIDE OF FREEDOM, NOT AGAINST IT	128

8.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS OF “MISTER ROGERS TALKS ABOUT LEARNING” FOR EXISTING TELELITERACY PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS..... 132

8.1 FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE ANALYSIS 139

REFERENCES..... 143

PREFACE

Your respective journeys through the rigors of doctoral studies will profoundly change your lives. These were the words of a wise professor spoken during the first class I took as a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. They were prophetic; my life is very different than it was five years ago. My worldview has changed evidenced in part by the approach I have taken to this formal inquiry of Fred Rogers' work. My perspective on how people come to know and to learn has been shaped and reshaped from my reflections and deliberations with faculty and student colleagues, committee members, and many others who have taken an interest in my research; as Freire (1993/1970) writes we are human beings perpetually engaged and intertwined in the processes of becoming. I am grateful beyond what words can express to my dissertation committee, especially my research advisor Dr. Michael Gunzenhauser, not only for his guidance and expertise but for the faith he has shown in me, a neophyte in the ways of formal constructivist inquiry. I am grateful to Family Communications, Incorporated, for permitting me to explore Mister Rogers' work toward the important aim of advancing teleliteracy education. I am also thankful for family and friends, especially my daughters Jennifer and Elizabeth; they have supported and encouraged me unwaveringly throughout this important part of my life. I am pleased with this dissertation as "the most informed and sophisticated construction that is possible to develop in this context, at this time," to borrow Guba and Lincoln's words (1989, p.179). I hope that this is the beginning of my contribution to the ongoing scholarly conversation

of seeking and finding ways to make teaching and learning more educative and more humanizing.

Dan Murray

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the last five decades, information and communication technologies across the world have shifted and grown; therefore, the parameters of literacy have broadened (Livingstone, 2004). While reading and writing remain “hugely significant” (p.3), Livingstone claims, literacy today requires the augmentation of skills needed to read many forms of audiovisual text. It is incumbent upon the field of media studies, she reasons, to seek and find a conceptual framework that spans all of the different kinds of media (print, audiovisual, telephony, and computer) in which citizens presently engage; however, she acknowledges, this is no easy pursuit.

Establishing a conceptual framework for media literacy is difficult because communication technologies change and grow prolifically. As Thoman and Jolls (2004) explain, media literacy education twenty years ago could focus simply on teaching children about media (and mostly about advertising). “Today,” they add, “the field has matured to a greater understanding of its potential, not just as a new kind of literacy but also as the engine for transforming the very nature of learning in a global multimedia environment” (p.21).

How can the field define concisely a concept so dense that it has the potential to transform learning globally? For over a decade, the field of media studies has worked from a widely adopted definition established at the 1992 Aspen Media Literacy Institute. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms (The Center for Media Literacy (CML), 2006). This definition is skill-based (Livingstone, 2004); it is

grounded in inquiry and process based pedagogy and therefore offers “not a new subject to teach but rather a new way to teach and even more important, *a new way to learn*” (Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p.21).

If media literacy is a catalyst for developing new ways of teaching and learning, then exploring educational media texts for insights on pedagogical framework seems prudent. Freire’s (1993/1970, 1998) discussion of mutual humanization as pedagogical praxis and Dewey’s (1938, 1944/1916) ideas on experience and education seem to provide a solid theoretical framework from which to analyze these kinds of media texts. Furthermore, Freire’s (1993/1970) overarching discussion on working with coded texts, and Carby’s (1993) decoding of popular media narratives, which have been constructed as rich pedagogic texts that exhibit self-conscious didacticism in their production, seem to provide a useful methodological framework for analyzing the media text under study. The methodology I employ for my study is guided by Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) discussion of constructivist inquiry.

Even though he thought of himself more as a friend and neighbor than as a teacher to his viewers (Sharapan, 2002), in his television series *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, Fred Rogers created a pedagogical text that exhibits self-conscious didacticism through its production elements. Five half-hour episodes of *Neighborhood* that are thematically titled “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) comprise the television narrative under study; encoded in the production elements of this television narrative is a unique pedagogical framework that offers valuable insights toward useful ways of thinking about teaching and learning in telilitracy education.

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM UNDER STUDY

Analyzing “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) focuses the study on one medium (television) and one kind of media literacy (teleliteracy). Good pedagogical frameworks already exist for teleliteracy (Hobbs, 2005; Masterman, 1994, 1989; Potter, 2001; Thoman & Jolls, 2004; Willis & Carden, 2004), and I will discuss these frameworks as part of my literature review. However, as Livingstone (2004) cautions, these frameworks may be too “heavily dependent on (their) historical origins in print, being therefore only poorly applicable to new media” (p.6). Furthermore, the provisions of these suggested frameworks, Hobbs (2004) regrets, have not persuaded enough schools across the U.S. to establish teleliteracy (and other forms of media literacy) in their curricula; only seven out of fifty states include any kind of media literacy, including teleliteracy, as a separate strand in their educational standards (Scheibe, 2004).

The relative disregard for teleliteracy as established curriculum in U.S. schools is problematic considering recent statistics on television viewing time. Americans watch a lot of television, according to the 2005 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the average American household, the set is on 7.6 hours per day (Johnson, 2005); college students spend more than 26 hours per week watching television (National On-Campus Report, 2005); adolescents ages 15 to 19 spend about 40% of their leisure time watching television, and the remainder they devote to their I-Pods or MP3 players, DVDs and cds, computers and cell phones (Brown & Keller, 2000; Johnson, 2005; Ravitch & Vitteriti, 2003; Robinson & Godbey, 2005). Among many non-print information and communication technologies in which young people engage today, television draws a significant amount of time and interest.

Teleliteracy education may be even more urgent considering that young people seem to shape the way they understand life, in large part, from television. Schultz et al. (1991) explain:

To a surprising extent, young people rely on the industry's products to learn about life and society. Popular music, films, and television form an appealing and lively cultural reservoir from which young people draw in their struggle to understand themselves and the larger world...the entertainment industry obligingly supplies... "maps of reality"...that metaphorically explain life and society and suggest ways of understanding and responding to dilemmas and perplexities. (p.177)

Furthermore, young people's manifestations of their relationships with television are often not healthy or desirable. Almost a half-century ago, Witty (cited in Postman, 1961) suggested that heavy television viewing by children was a manifestation of boredom and an unsatisfying life. Mothers, he declared, were using television as babysitters for their children. If so, how many children have been influenced by this babysitter? A number of empirical studies have unsuccessfully attempted to correlate heavy television exposure with juvenile delinquency, passivity, aggression, violence, and unrealistic attitudes toward life's problems; however, these studies have concluded only that *relationships* exist between television viewing and negative attitudes and behaviors manifested by young people (Brown, 2002; Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Klein et al., 1993; Peterson, Moore, & Furstenberg, 1991; Postman, 1961). These relationships are troubling, but as Hobbs (2004) and Rogow (2004) observe, studies done to address this problem have been more about television (and its adverse effects) than literacy (and children's inchoate understandings of life constructed from their relationships with television).

Many in the field support research that advances teleliteracy's potential to help young people form better constructs of ways they think about the world. For example, Masterman (1994) argues that teleliteracy involves more than twiddling knobs and stringing together facts. Teleliteracy has the potential, he contends, to create in young people critical awareness and

consciousness. Likewise, Merrow (1993) claims that teleliteracy has an unmatched power to invite exploration and intellectual rigor, educate citizens and change society. Eco (1979) has insisted that “a democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection—not an invitation for hypnosis” (p.33).

Merrow (1993) is adamant also that teleliteracy can help to make school learning less hypnotic. Students today, he argues, are understandably disinterested in and rebellious against mind-numbing drills, tedious lectures, and busywork. Few would disagree, but is teleliteracy education in schools a pedagogical improvement or a potential landmine? From the advent of television, scholars have worried whether new communication technologies would adversely affect print literacy (Bagdikian, 1973; Steiner, 1973). Livingstone (2004) contends that media literacy skills are an augmentation, not a replacement of print literacy skills; however, whether media literacy education belongs in schools has been a contentious issue among members of the field. Many scholars side with Gitlin’s (2003) claim that “a good curriculum that dumbs down to the humdrum standards of mainstream popular culture is a curriculum unworthy of its name” (p.35). Others share Merrow’s (1993) perspective that television “belongs in schools, not as an end in itself, but as a means to mastery of essential skills” (p.46).

Pinar (2004) endorses media literacy education for more than its potential to advance student skills. He claims that media literacy invites young people to bring to learning spaces the knowledge they gain from television and other forms of their popular culture in order to better understand their own situatedness in the world. Whereas Pinar believes that television can potentially open learning opportunities for students, Bloom (1987) accuses television of closing students’ minds. He writes that television.

has assaulted and overturned the privacy of the home, the real American privacy,

which permitted the development of a higher and more independent life within democratic society. Parents can no longer control the atmosphere of home and have even lost the will to do so. With great subtlety and energy, television enters not only a room, but also the tastes of old and young alike, appealing to the immediately present and subverting whatever does not conform to it. (pp.58-59)

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Ernest L. Boyer has expressed similar feelings to Bloom's about television. Boyer has contended that television destroys schools' efforts to reduce rampant illiteracy (Browne, 1992). Browne counters, "Boyer and all of us need to reexamine the whole concept of (literacy) and our means of achieving it" (p.28). Refusing to acknowledge the changes that have occurred in communication media, Browne continues, stymies growth in literacy education and negatively impacts students' abilities to cope with the present day world.

The changes in communication technologies, however, have worried Huebner (1975). While he has wanted curriculum to respect unconditionally students as free people living in a public world, he has been critical of student engagement in the literacy of popular media forms like television. Asserting that television and other similar technologies stifle young people's imaginations and undermine the vision for a more democratic youth, Huebner has concluded that media literacy education makes learning more instrumental.

"It is not technology that promotes or dictates instrumentalism," counters Weaver (2005, p.89). Rather, "it is the lack of imagination in regards to how technology can be utilized as a supplement to our minds and bodies to create the educational poetry Huebner envisioned." Properly channeled, claims Browne (1992), tel literacy and other forms of popular culture engagement can be the most powerful force that drives students toward a common learning goal.

Schwarz (2003) believes this goal should be to connect young people with curriculum. Because students have more experience than many of their teachers in new media technologies, a real opportunity exists for collaborative study between young people and adults—joint research in which both discover new learning by discussing difficult issues, Schwarz adds.

Authentic communication across generations is what media literacy promotes, according to Alvermann (2002). Despite their advocacy of media literacy, however, Alvermann and Heron (2001) also acknowledge that introducing this kind of authentic dialogue into school curriculum stirs fears, apprehensions, moral debates, and criticisms among teachers, administrators, school boards, parents, spiritual and political leaders, as well as other community leaders that worry about whether students are mature enough to engage in this kind of learning. What if telilitracy threatens to take away the enjoyment young people value in watching television *outside* of school? How will teachers that are a full generation ahead of their students handle the daunting challenge of facilitating media literacy experiences for their students?

Some detractors of media literacy education do not wonder “How?” but “Why?” Ravitch and Vitteriti (2003) are particularly critical of some forms of popular youth entertainment. They write:

When young people...are exposed to the homophobic and misogynist lyrics of Eminem, the sexual adventurism of Madonna, of the violent, drug-infested styles of “gangsta” rappers, they are exposed to values that undermine good character. Each of these performers in his or her own way, is teaching lessons in life, lessons about how people are supposed to interact. (pp.4-5)

Ravitch and Vitteriti charge parents with the responsibility of becoming the primary mediators between the controversial messages of many popular media forms and the character

development of their children. Parents, they insist, should either block their children's exposure to these kinds of entertainment, or they should experience the media with their children. Either way, these scholars contend, parents can minimize the unhealthy attitudes their children might develop about themselves and others from engaging in popular forms of entertainment, like rap and hip-hop music, with no adult mediation.

Other scholars like Weaver and Daspit (2001) see great value in the study of rap music. They believe rap is an art form that offers a potentially rich discourse to students as long as it is not co-opted to suit an agenda or judged immediately as subversive. Rap music, they contend, is vibrant, romantic, and creative; it is, they continue, an oppositional text with a general economy of meaning that is worthy of student exploration and analysis. Likewise, Dimitriadis (2001) supports the textual merits of hip-hop music because his research in a mid-west urban setting has shown that this kind of music has helped the adolescents whom he has studied to better understand their own identities. Still, Ravitch and Vitteriti (2003) maintain that the raising and teaching of children requires a commitment to elevating their minds, bodies, and spirits. "It means," they add, "cultivating the capacity to distinguish between entertainment that is enriching and entertainment that degrades and diminishes human life" (p.13).

Scholars on both sides of the media literacy debate offer compelling points. Whether controversial media potentially undermines or enhances young people's characters clearly is a contested issue. My concern, however, is that this unresolved debate infringes upon the field's progress toward giving young people through media literacy education the resources they need to think about their world in healthier ways. Caught in the middle of this dialectical tension, as Giroux (1997) observes, young people feel betrayed by the adults they look to for guidance. When adults both celebrate youth popular culture as vibrant *and* criticize it as morally

reprehensible, they alienate youth, according to Giroux. Therefore, as long as this debate continues to be unresolved, then young people, as Schultz et al. (1991) remind us, will continue to seek guidance with understanding life's dilemmas and perplexities solely from the entertainment industry, who often do not operate in children's best interests.

The objective of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, however, has been to operate in the best interests of children by giving them the resources they need to better navigate their own lives and to develop a broader awareness of how their lives are interconnected with the lives of others (Rogers, 1996). As a children's educational television production, *Neighborhood's* aim has been to mediate the space between its young viewers and the ways that these young viewers think about their world.

In other words, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is not intended to present a pedagogical framework that is a means to an end; rather, it has been constructed to offer a means to the beginning of an ongoing conversation between adults (mainly parents) and children. *Neighborhood* gives children and adults the resources to think and talk about the questions and understandings that emerge from experiences with, for example, controversial music, film, television, and internet sites. By design, as Sharapan (2002) explains, *Neighborhood* facilitates not only the beginnings of a demystification of television, but more so the beginnings of a demystification of many things in life that are difficult for children to fully grasp. Through its content, *Neighborhood* is constructed to provide a quality educational television experience for its viewers without *imposing* on its viewers a standard for what constitutes a quality television experience. Likewise, I am not studying *Neighborhood* to make the claim that this television series has more value for children than any other form of popular media, educational or not, in which they engage. Rather, I am studying *Neighborhood* because its pedagogy is meant to

humanize, but not moralize; its tone is meant to be didactic, but not prescriptive; and its regard for children's learning is meant to be guiding and respectful, but not judgmental.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To advance teleliteracy education I have sought to deepen my understanding of *Neighborhood's* pedagogy in order to strengthen existing teleliteracy frameworks. Toward this objective, I have engaged in an analysis of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), a theme of the *Neighborhood* series comprised of five one-half hour programs. Using Dewey's (1938) theory on experience and education and Freire's ideas on the pedagogy of mutual humanization as theoretical framework, and Carby's (1993) model for analyzing educational television text that is "explicitly pedagogic in intent and didactic in tone" (p.237) and through its power accomplishes ideological work, I have explored the values that Rogers has encoded in his production elements for the purpose of inviting his viewers to visit his *Neighborhood* and be part of educative learning experiences. Strengthening existing teleliteracy frameworks seems possible if the field can seek and find pedagogy that successfully invites young people to integrate their learning experiences into their everyday lives and to navigate positively and confidently, but not cynically, the popular media in which they engage and more broadly the challenging issues of a growingly complex world.

"Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), like all of the stories in the *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* series, has been constructed not from the question, "What can we GIVE CHILDREN from the set?" but rather, "What are THEY BRINGING to the set?" (Sharapan, 2002, p.30). The text uniquely invites children of all ages to make a television visit, bring their

experiences with them, and explore themes of learning with Mister Rogers, the facilitator. The elements present in every episode of *Neighborhood* have been carefully structured (Zelevansky, 2004) and placed into each program according to a specific and unwavering philosophical framework—that “the best USE of television happens when the program is over...and children USE what they have seen,” and “as children talk...about things they see on television, those things are more likely to be integrated, absorbed, and more relevant in their everyday lives” (Sharapan, 2002, p.33).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDING THE STUDY

My analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) has been guided by the following research questions:

1. What makes “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) an educative praxis of mutual humanization for viewers?
2. What learning values are encoded in the educative praxis of mutual humanization that exists in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992)?
3. How do the praxis and the learning values construct a *Neighborhood* learning culture in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992)?
4. What resources for developing a greater awareness of self and others are made available in the educative praxis of mutual humanization that exists in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992)?
5. Based on my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) as educative pedagogy within a praxis of mutual humanization, what claims might I make for

strengthening existing teleliteracy frameworks?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Deepening the field's understanding of *how* to use television in ways that encourage young people to talk after the program is significant. This study attempts to strengthen existing teleliteracy pedagogy in its commitment to facilitate opportunities for young people to integrate their learning into their lives. This study contributes meaningfully to the efforts of teleliteracy framers that have committed themselves to finding ways to help young people be more socially conscious and construct healthier understandings of the popular media in which they engage in order to better understand their world, without becoming overly skeptical in the process.

The significance of studying “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), however, extends beyond just understanding a pedagogical model. Rogers’ pedagogy also deepens the field’s understanding of how to make learning more humanizing and more educative from and beyond a Freirean (1993/1970) and Deweyan (1938) perspective. The purpose of this study should not be misconstrued as simply seeking a way to make young people feel good about themselves. This is not a study in how to make existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks more “touchy-feely.”

In other words, this study attempts to retain the critical underpinnings and avoid the domestication of existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks. The ultimate significance of this study is that it might help the field to consider more deeply how teleliteracy education can potentially invite young people to develop a deeper awareness of themselves and others. Rogers’ work shows the field how to invite young people to a learning space in which they develop a

more profound sense that being human means taking responsibility for one's own actions because every one of these actions impacts others in some way. This kind of teleliteracy framework cultivates in youth positive, open attitudes rather than cynical, closed attitudes toward all stimuli, including popular media, from which young people can learn.

As a high school English teacher of 16 years who often has engaged his students in teleliteracy experiences, I personally draw significance from this study in ways that I can strengthen my own pedagogical approach by making it more humanizing and educative. Furthermore, as an adjunct professor of pre-service secondary language arts teachers, I can draw from this study a framework for engaging my college students in democratic explorations of how to make teleliteracy education more humanizing and educative. I also would like to facilitate this kind of exploration in professional development situations, such as research conferences and teacher in-services. I hope that my study will inspire other researchers to explore educational television texts like Mister Rogers' for the purpose of strengthening existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks. The field's collective efforts toward strengthening teleliteracy research and practice may bolster confidence in teleliteracy education among detractors, encourage more schools to integrate teleliteracy in curricula, and most importantly open other research avenues for exploring how teleliteracy and other kinds of media literacy can fully realize the global interconnectedness that media literacy framers and advocates believe it can.

1.5 GENERAL RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTION OF “MISTER ROGERS TALKS ABOUT LEARNING” AS THE TEXT UNDER STUDY

Reiterating one of the problems confronting teleliteracy pedagogy today, the choice of television text for young people’s literacy engagement can be a contentious issue. However, the researcher is not proposing *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* as good text for this study because it is innocuous. On the contrary, as Poniewozik (2003) writes, “What made *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* great and unique is that, for all its beautiful days in the neighborhood, it was also the darkest work of popular culture made for preschoolers since perhaps the Brothers Grimm” (p.72).

Five good reasons why *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* is a good choice of text for this study are: First, although the series has been oversentimentalized, satirized, and parodied, it effectively deals with challenging issues like fear, divorce, and death (Bishop, 2003; Poniewozik, 2003); *Neighborhood* is “radical pedagogy” that strategically uses television form (Zelevansky, 2004, p.196); what I mean by this will be clearer in my analysis.

Second, it has been constructed on a unique inclusive foundation explained by two metaphors; the first metaphor is that each program is a *television visit* (Sharapan, 2002), which is consistent with the Freirean (1993/1970) notion that learning happens through dialogic communication, not banked knowledge; also, Mister Rogers tacitly attends to his viewers and his relationships with them in every episode of the series; the second metaphor is that every episode takes place in the *Neighborhood*, which suggests, drawing from both Freire (1993/1970) and Dewey (1938), that learning is an ongoing *co-investigation* of experiences, democratically constructed to cultivate every participant’s increased awareness of and responsibility for the welfare of self and others.

Third, each program of the series invites the “interpretation of images, words, things, events, and kinesthetic sensation that allows children and adults to locate themselves in everyday experience” (Zelavansky, 2004, p.195); *Neighborhood* focuses the viewer on the present, not the future (Sharapan, 2002); in Deweyan (1938) terms, each episode of the series allows viewers to engage entirely on the present without worrying too much about how their present experiences will prepare them for their future experiences.

Fourth, the series has been constructed in week-long stories on a single theme to model that learning is a process that involves conflicts which can not be solved in a half-hour’s time (Sharapan, 2002); patience with the processes of learning is one of the virtues that Mister Rogers tacitly includes in every episode of *Neighborhood*;

Fifth, in production for over three decades and still airing across the country today, *Neighborhood* is known worldwide to multiple generations and has won multiple Emmy awards (Bishop, 2003); its pedagogy has appealed to multiple generations, claims Zelevansky (2004), because Rogers’ *Neighborhood* has been a sanctuary that “never denies the commonplace anxieties and misunderstandings of the young children that make up the audience” (p.197).

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Chapter II discusses in depth Freire’s (1993/1970, 1998) theory of mutual humanization as pedagogical praxis and Dewey’s (1938, 1944/1916) theory of educative experience as compatible lenses for critiquing: 1) how existing teleliteracy frameworks may be strengthened by 2) analyzing Rogers’ pedagogical framework through these theoretical lenses.

Freire (1993/1970) theorizes that a pedagogical praxis of mutual humanization between teachers and students includes authentic dialogue fostered by mutual trust and facilitated by faith in and love for one another. This kind of praxis, according to Freire, engenders rather than anesthetizes creative power in children. To cultivate this creative power in an educational praxis of mutual humanization, Freire contends, requires the teacher-facilitator's commitment to a pedagogy of problem-posing rather than banked learning. As problem-posers, Freire explains, teachers acknowledge that both the students and they are unfinished, uncompleted beings who democratically are becoming aware of themselves and one another in continual states of emerging consciousnesses. Sometimes, Freire further observes, this consciousness emerges more meaningfully in a pedagogical praxis that includes silence, listening, and humility.

Freire's call for silence, listening, and humility as part of the pedagogical praxis of mutual humanization seem compatible with Dewey's (1938) claim that an educative experience requires students to develop a "stop and think" attitude toward future experiences. For Dewey, the continuity of the experience, which is determined by the value of the subsequent experience, is the most important determinant of whether or not a learning experience is educative. According to Dewey, a good continuity of experience requires the student to form habits that are grounded in reason and not cause, in which: the direction of growth from the experience must be aimed toward increased sensitivity and responsiveness to future experiences; the value of the present experience, including the opportunity to learn collateral lessons as part of the experience, must take on more importance than the preparation for future experiences; the development of social responsibility from the experience must be engendered by the interaction established for the experience by the facilitator; and the experience must foster in the learner a decrease in

impulsive decision making and an increase in reflection, careful judgment, and responsibility for the learner's decisions and how those decisions affect others.

Freire's (1993/1970) discussion of how to engage coded situations has been very useful for establishing a methodological framework for my analysis. Freire affirms that an interpretation of encoded text would require the back and forth movement between the concrete and abstract concepts that are part of the coded situation; this dialectical movement, as Freire directs, has enabled me to enter deeper layers of analysis with "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992). Employing Freire's concept of how to research a coded situation, I have been able to, as Guba and Lincoln (1989) direct

identify and describe various emic constructions and place those constructions in touch—with the intent of evolving a more informed and sophisticated construction than...the researcher's...etic construction represents. The outcome is a joint, or collaborative, construction (or, more appropriately, a reconstruction of formerly held constructions). (p.138)

Employing the constructivist researcher's language that Guba and Lincoln provide, the insights I have drawn from this study as my inquiry product have emerged through a process of discovering, shaping, negotiating, and interweaving multiple texts. This process has begun, as Guba and Lincoln direct, with the entry condition of establishing myself as the human instrument for the study, bringing my tacit understanding of the study context to the research, and laying my subjectivities as a researcher "on the table" (p.176). Engaging the study from these entry conditions, I have written my way into a deeper understanding of the values encoded in Rogers' production elements, and then a deeper understanding of the educative pedagogy of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) and the praxis of mutual humanization Rogers has encoded

in his pedagogy, and then a deeper understanding of the virtues and virtuous practices that are part of Rogers' learning culture, a culture in which people are given opportunities to grow in their self-awareness, their awareness of others, and their awareness that all of the decisions they make in their lives affect others in some way. My inquiry, in other words, has reached a depth that has enabled me to imply ways in which existing teleliteracy frameworks may be strengthened.

Carby's work was useful for helping me to penetrate the first layers of my analysis. Carby's (1993) study of popular media narratives that are pedagogic in intent and didactic in tone has established a precedent for how coded inscriptions might emerge when the production elements of these kinds of media narratives are analyzed not as a priori criteria, but as living codes that are constructed and strengthened with each viewer's experience with the narratives. I factor the methodology for coded situations discussed by both Freire (1993/1970) and Carby (1993) in my explanation of the procedures I have followed for my data analysis of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992). I also explain the subjectivity that I have brought to this study and the limitations that are important to consider alongside my analysis. These subjectivities and limitations, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989), affirm that no researcher, positivist or constructivist, may enter a research experience "tabula rasa" (p.176). I present the subjectivity of the tacit knowledge I bring to this study because, as Guba and Lincoln explain, "it is the emic material that remains opaque to the investigator's propositional formulations." They add that "if the investigator is to be prohibited from using tacit knowledge as he or she attempts to pry open this oyster of unknowns, the possibility of constructivist inquiry would be severely constrained, if not eliminated altogether" (p.176). The joint construction then of my etic and emic views has led me to the insights I have drawn from my analysis.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF INSIGHTS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY

Critiquing “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) in a frame of Freire’s theory of mutual humanization as pedagogical praxis and Dewey’s theoretical claims for what makes a learning experience educative has yielded rich insights toward the goal of strengthening an existing pedagogical framework for teleliteracy education. The specific insights that I have drawn from an analysis of Rogers’ work are that true dialogue among all participants in a teleliteracy experience may be cultivated in a learning space that is safe and trusting but also respectful of and open to what the learners are bringing to the experience. In Rogers’ humanizing praxis, this authentic dialogue between adults and children happens in a culture of mutual trust. Faith and love, which are values that Rogers encodes in many elements of the learning experiences he constructs, are intended to make this mutual trust even more cohesive. Furthermore, Rogers considers each program to be a television visit; therefore, he carefully attends to his visitors and constantly works toward developing a caring and trusting relationship with them. As part of the praxis of mutual humanization within Rogers’ educative pedagogy, adults and children become co-investigators; Rogers provides opportunity for the shared exploration and discovery of learning between adults and children along with a mutual appreciation for one another’s creative power that manifests within, and growth that manifests from each learning experience.

This aspect of Rogers’ framework seems to offer substantial value to existing teleliteracy frameworks; it suggests the possibility that adults and children, who are engaged in a mutually humanizing teleliteracy praxis, could learn together as *co*-investigators in a learning space of shared inclusivity. It suggests that both adults and children could take away from these teleliteracy experiences a growing awareness that all human beings are incomplete and are becoming more keenly aware of their incompleteness. “In this incompleteness and this awareness,”

Freire (1993/1970) writes, “lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity” (p.65).

Fostering through teleliteracy pedagogy a greater awareness that education is an ongoing process that in part defines what it means to be human seems also to carry a tremendous potential for humanizing learning *and* learners. In a pedagogical framework that includes space for silence, listening, and reflection, Mister Rogers poses to learners questions he designs to start a conversation that he hopes will continue after the learning experience is over. In other words Rogers’ framework seems committed to facilitating democratic learning experiences in the present that will lead to positive manifestations of that learning in the future. From the experiences he facilitates, Rogers facilitates for his viewers opportunities to become more attuned to their capacities to make informed decisions with a growing awareness of how their decisions affect others. As Noddings (1998) claims, this kind of awareness allows human beings to realize their freedom to its fullest potential.

The insights I have gained from analyzing “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) address the multiple layers that could exist within an educative teleliteracy pedagogical framework that operates in a praxis of mutual humanization.

1.8 ROADMAP OF THE DISSERTATION

I have organized the subsequent chapters of my dissertation in a way that most lucidly and meaningfully takes the reader through the concepts of exploration and discovery that have emerged in my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992).

Chapter 2, **Methodology**, discusses the methodological framework I have established for the study, the procedures I have followed to analyze the data, the subjectivity I have brought to the study, and the study limitations that I have acknowledged in conducting this study.

I engage my analysis using a theoretical framework of Freire's (1993/1970, 1998) theory of problem-posing education in a praxis of mutual humanization and Dewey's (1938, 1944/1916) philosophy of educative experience. Chapter 3, **Review of literature**, begins with a thorough discussion of these theories and how they are compatible as a lens for looking at the pedagogy of "Mister Rogers' Talks about Learning" (1992). My review of literature continues with a brief, but important discussion of existing teleliteracy frameworks, of the ways in which these existing frameworks align with Dewey (1938, 1944/1916) and Freire (1993/1970, 1998), and of the aspects of these existing frameworks that may be strengthened by Rogers' pedagogy. The chapter ends with a discussion of the discourses associated with Mister Rogers' work and its compatibility with a Deweyan (1938, 1944/1916) and Freirean (1993/1970, 1998) theoretical critique.

My review of the Mister Rogers discourses dovetails nicely into Chapter 4, **Précis of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and overview of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning."** In this chapter, I discuss the background of the production of *Neighborhood*, and I overview the series format, structure, and content with specific attention to the programs under study. I also introduce in this chapter *Neighborhood's* unique dialogic communication between the host and his viewers in which their "television visits" (Sharapan, 2002) are extended through their "letter visits" (Rogers, 1996).

This chapter, along with the literature review and methodology prepare the reader for Chapters 5, 6, and 7, which contain my data analysis of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning"

(1992). After moving back and forth between abstract and concrete analytical concepts, I have decided to organize the major themes of my discussion accordingly.

Chapter 5 is entitled **An educative pedagogy of democratic learning and mutual trust in a safe and caring space**. In this chapter, I interpret the values that Mister Rogers encodes mostly into the learning spaces of his television house, a sanctuary that clearly belongs to *both* him and his television friends, and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, a place of pretend where these encoded values are extended and affirmed. I also discuss how faith and love are encoded values that foster mutual trust between Mister Rogers and his viewers, as well as how this mutual trust engenders the acknowledgement and development of each learner's creativity in a democratic and humanizing learning praxis. Furthermore, I present ways in which Mister Rogers fosters a caring relationship with all of his viewers when he attends to them as his neighbors and television visitors.

This praxis of mutual humanization exists in Mister Rogers' pedagogy of problem-posing rather than banked learning, which is the second overarching theme that has emerged from my analysis of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992). Chapter 6, **An educative pedagogy of emerging consciousness and "becoming" awareness of self and others based on problem-posing rather than banked learning**, discusses the ways Mister Rogers utilizes an inquiry-based approach rather than a banked learning concept to facilitate his viewers' engagement in and reflection on the learning experiences he offers during each program's "television visit" (Sharapan, 2002). From this pedagogical framework Mister Rogers seems to provide each of his viewers with a variety of resources that, to employ Freirean (1993/1970, p.65) language, engender an emerging consciousness and a "becoming" awareness of self and others.

Mister Rogers seems to facilitate this emerging consciousness and awareness within his viewers by constructing a learning culture that embraces silence, listening, and humility. Chapter 7, **An educative pedagogy of silence, listening, and humility, and other virtues and virtuous practices in a “stop and think” learning culture**, discusses the third major theme that has emerged from my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992). This chapter discusses how the presence of virtues and virtuous practices evident in Mister Rogers’ pedagogy are intended to make *Neighborhood* experiences more educative by cultivating in learners the desire to carry these virtues and virtuous practices to future life experiences. Each of the five episodes of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” affords time and space for silent reflection, a unique kind of listening, and a humility that is intended to foster in viewers a desire to stop and think about themselves and others. In Mister Rogers’ learning culture, viewers are given opportunities to develop the virtuous attitudes that everyone in the *Neighborhood* matters and is interconnected by what each person brings to the learning experience; that each person in the *Neighborhood* is growing, therefore creative, and yet limited in that no person can do everything; that each person in the *Neighborhood* is learning how to feel responsible for others and how to make decisions with others democratically, regardless of their race or gender; and each person is learning to accept responsibility for all of the decisions he or she makes. My claims in this chapter segue into what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as my inquiry product, in which the joint constructions of my etic and emic perspectives ultimately come together.

In Chapter 8, **Study implications and future research directions**, I draw implications from my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” for how existing teleliteracy frameworks may be strengthened. Specifically, I discuss how Mister Rogers’ educative pedagogy and humanizing praxis construct a learning culture that is committed to facilitating

opportunities for learners to develop a more profound awareness of themselves and others. I also acknowledge how the subjectivity I have brought to this study factors into my ownership of the knowledge claims I have made from my study; nevertheless, I end the dissertation with the firm belief that what Mister Rogers has strived for through his concept of the *Neighborhood* richly informs what teleliteracy framers are striving for through the pedagogy they have constructed and advanced—that television’s greatest use, as Sharapan (2002) expresses, happens when the experience of watching is over and the experience of talking about what has been seen and experienced begins. My dissertation continues with a discussion of the methodology.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework for my study is largely informed by Freire's (1993/1970) notion that a researcher has to move back and forth between the concrete and abstract concepts of any coded situation in order to reach the deeper layers of the researcher's interpretation of the code. Before discussing Freire's methodological framework (1993/1970) in more detail, however, I briefly digress to Freire's noteworthy explanation of how these concrete and abstract concepts come to be in the first place. Freire writes:

It is as transforming and creative beings that humans, in their permanent relations with reality, produce...social institutions, ideas, and concepts.

The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization, constitute the themes (that)...indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled.

(p.82)

Consistent with Freire's notion, Rogers generated the creative concepts and ideas for *Neighborhood* from a transformative awareness that television was impeding children's opportunities to use this powerful medium in more humanizing ways. Rogers' desire to transform children's television emerged in 1950 from his dissatisfaction with the medium. A college senior home for spring break, Rogers had the opportunity to watch some early children's television programming; he described it as "nonsense, pies in faces, and slapstick" (Sharapan,

2002, p.30). Humanizing the experience of television became Rogers' ministry. Resolving that "children deserve better," Rogers embarked on a journey to change children's television by venturing through, among other experiences in the industry, WQED's *The Children's Corner*, for which he worked behind the camera, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) *Misterogers*, the forerunner of *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*, for which he assumed the role of a television host for the first time (Sharapan, 2002, p.30). In Freirean (1993/1970) terms, Mister Rogers' relations with these television realities helped him to produce the conceptual themes of *Neighborhood*. All of the generative themes of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) apprehend Rogers' experiential awareness that children "want to spend time with adults who talk to them about the things that matter in their lives and who do it in ways that are understandable" (Sharapan, 2002, p.31). From this awareness Rogers constructed the television narrative "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) as an encoded praxis of mutual humanization within an educative pedagogy.

The analysis of a "coded situation," explains Freire (1993/1970), requires the researcher to move dialectically between the abstract and the concrete. Decoding, adds Freire, requires moving from the part to the whole and then returning to the parts; this in turn requires that the Subject recognize himself in the object and recognize the object as the situation in which he finds himself, together, with other Subjects. If the decoding is well done, this movement of flux and reflux from the abstract to the concrete which occurs in the analysis of a coded situation leads to the supersedence of the abstraction *by* the critical perception of the concrete, which has already ceased to be a dense, impenetrable reality. (p.86)

The production elements contained in the five-episodes of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) have provided the parts from which I have been able to decode conceptual abstractions about Rogers’ pedagogical framework. From these abstractions, concrete themes about learning have emerged. The emergence of these concrete themes has enabled me to return to the abstractions and, using Dewey (1938) and Freire (1993/1970) as a theoretical lens, to begin to decode these abstractions and associate them with the generative themes. My interpretation of Rogers’ learning culture has emerged from these associations, and a deeper understanding of this learning culture has given me a sense of what learning can look like in a praxis of mutual humanization within an educative pedagogy. My understanding of Rogers’ educative pedagogy within a humanizing praxis has supported the concrete claims and implications I have drawn from my analysis for strengthening existing teleliteracy pedagogical framework.

From a Freirean (1993/1970) perspective, if a “dominated consciousness” exists about the way learning should be, and assuming that the way many people are thinking about learning today increasingly serves the interests of those that wish to bank education in children, then studies like mine seem imperative. This kind of research I have done, from a Freirean perspective, might help a free people to recognize limiting situations and inhibiting forces associated with the advancement of teleliteracy education, because as Freire writes:

When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would have to reverse their starting point: they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and

by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole. (p.85)

Seeking critical awareness from the production elements of a “television visit” (Sharapan, 2002, p.31) with children seems to qualify as reversing the starting point in a Freirean (1993/1970) sense of the phrase. As Freire directs, “this investigation is to serve as a basis for developing an educational program in which teacher-student and student-teachers combine their cognitions of the same object” (p.88), because, as Sharapan (2002) expresses in Mister Rogers-like fashion, “It’s through relationships that we grow best and learn best” (p.31). This kind of study does not “‘adulterate’ the analytical results” (Freire 1993/1970, p.88). On the contrary, drawing from Freire, it represents people seeking out reality together. It contrasts with the antidialogical and non-communicative nature of banked learning. It affirms that

the more educators and the people investigate the people’s thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate. Education and thematic investigation, in the problem-posing concept of education, are simply different moments of the same process. (p.90)

From a Freirean standpoint, my thematic investigation of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) is a “cultural action” (p.92). In Freirean terms, my study seeks to decipher a living code in order to deepen the field’s understanding of a learning culture constructed in a humanizing and educative praxis with significant implications for teleliteracy education.

To apply Carby’s (1993) language, Rogers constructs in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) a popular television narrative that accomplishes ideological work as a text that exhibits “self-conscious didacticism” in its production (p.236). As Carby’s work has demonstrated, a popular pedagogical media narrative like Rogers’ can be analyzed for what has been encoded in its production elements. Carby does not regard these production elements as a

priori analytical criteria; rather, out of her analysis of the openings and closings, music and lyric, conflicts and resolutions, settings, character representations, and themes emerge inscriptions of cultural values, issues, and concerns on the “bodies” (p.236) of the people toward whom these narratives have been directed.

Carby’s work provides a precedent for decoding the production elements of Rogers’ pedagogical television narrative for the cultural values and concerns it inscribes on the “bodies” of the children to whom Rogers’ ideological work is directed. Likewise, Carby has expressed that the two texts she has decoded in her study have displayed “a Dickensian urge to transform the existing social order” and have appealed “to the hearts and minds of the privileged to intervene in the lives of the less fortunate than themselves” (p.237). Nevertheless, both of the texts that Carby has studied, despite identifying the profound inequalities of power, wealth, and privilege that are woven into the American social fabric, have not called for an end to economic injustice or an upheaval of the social dichotomy of the powerful and powerless, according to Carby’s analysis.

Through a Freirean (1993/1970) lens, Rogers also seems to encode Dickensian urges into “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992). As Sharapan (2002) asserts, Rogers’ pedagogy is respectful of his young audiences. Rogers seems well aware that children have a low position in the social order; however, in Freirean (1993/1970) terms, Mister Rogers does not make himself the authority and therefore is never really “teaching” (p.73). Consequently, the methodological framework for this thematic analysis assumes that both Mister Rogers and his television visitors are, to use Freire’s words, “jointly responsible for a process in which all grow,” and that Rogers, himself, is “*on the side of freedom, not against it*” (p.61).

2.1 PROCEDURES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

I constructed the procedures for my study with the guidance of Guba and Lincoln's (1989) discussion of constructivist inquiry methodology. The procedures for the study were in the following six major steps:

1. I viewed the five video tapes that comprise the thematic television narrative "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), and I read closely the show scripts and teleprompter copy provided by Family Communication, Incorporated. During the first viewing and reading, I noted impressions in a journal I kept on my laptop computer. My first journal data analyses were full of conceptual abstractions about the show and its pedagogical intent. Much of this data I recorded in the form of "Why?" questions. (For example, I wondered about the rituals I was observing from episode to episode. I wondered about the space of Mister Rogers' television house and the movement within the space, and I wondered about the dialogue, which often was inquiry based. I wondered how everything I was observing in Rogers' carefully structured format and content was possibly encoding some value about learning.) My first journal notes were very raw, but as I analyzed them more closely I noticed that themes were beginning to emerge in the data. At this point of my analysis of the "Mister Rogers' Talks about Learning" programs, I experienced the anxiety caused by the multiple pieces that were emerging in my data. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) explain:

Given that the inquirer does not know what he or she does not know, it is impossible to be very specific about anything. But as the design proceeds, the constructivist seeks continuously to refine and extend the design—to help it unfold. As each sample is selected, each datum recorded, and each element

of the joint construction devised, the design itself can become more focused.

As the constructivist inquirer becomes better acquainted with what is salient, the sample becomes more directed, the data analysis more structured, the construction more definitive. (p.180)

Encouraged by Guba and Lincoln's assurance that data generated in constructivist inquiry eventually becomes less overwhelming to the researcher, I began to work through the pieces evolving in my data.

2. I proceeded to analyze my raw data specifically for how I might begin to critique the production elements of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) through the lens of Freire's (1993/1970, 1998) praxis of mutual humanization within Dewey's (1938, 1944/1916) conditions for educative pedagogical experience. I added more journal notes as I organized my data according to the production elements that I identified in my journal record. Carby's (1993) discussion of the production elements that had emerged as meaningful to her study was helpful because it provided me a language with which to speak about the production elements I considered meaningful in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992). (For example, I made notes on the importance of the opening and closing rituals of every episode, the pacing of the dialogue and movement in each episode, the nonverbal forms of communication, the objects Mister Rogers brought with him for each visit, the colors of the set and scenery, the music and lyric, and many other production elements that seemed to contain pedagogical values that Rogers had encoded carefully into each of these production pieces.)
3. After I organized my data by these production elements and the encoded values that seemed to associate with each element, I again watched the five video tapes and read the

scripts and teleprompter copy. This time, I stopped and started the tapes at points in which I wanted to concentrate my observation on each specific production element into which I had organized my data. A closer look at these segments of the tapes allowed me to add to, affirm, or adjust the data I had associated with each production element. I also began to uncover deeper layers of analysis in my critique of these encoded elements through my theoretical lens. I rewound and watched salient portions of the tapes multiple times to ensure a thorough critique of how my data were suggesting that Rogers had encoded pedagogical values that seemed consistent with the Deweyan (1938) and Freirean (1993/1970) lens I was using. I also looked again at the script and teleprompter copy that coincided with all of these segments of the tapes.

4. Next, I analyzed the data I had constructed for generative themes of learning. I created a rough outline of themes as additional data, and I began to consider how the themes could be organized in a way that would deepen my understanding of Rogers' pedagogy. After I connected the encoded pedagogical values I had discovered to this point with the learning themes on my rough outline, I felt ready to move among the multiple texts with which I was working—my outline, my journal data, the videotapes of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning," the scripts and teleprompter copy of the five episodes, and the discourses—to begin to construct my narrative analysis.
5. I then wrote my way into a deeper and more precise understanding of the ways in which Rogers constructed an educative pedagogical framework in a praxis of mutual humanization. Before I resumed the writing each day, I re-read everything I had written. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest, my analysis was a process of multiple reconstructions of the text I was creating. Drawing from Guba and Lincoln, my goal was

to reach textual consensus, or in other words a narrative representation that seemed “right” (p.180), not only to me and my research advisor, but to a number of other people who were familiar with Mister Rogers and were willing to read my analysis and give me feedback. My narrative reconstructions developed through my continuous discoveries and negotiations of moving back and forth between the text I was creating and the multiple texts with which I was working to create my narrative; it was an iterative process of shaping and interweaving all of the salient pieces of data that were evolving into a precise and meaningful analysis of Rogers’ work and its value for existing tel literacy pedagogical frameworks. “If consensus can be reached,” Guba and Lincoln add, “it should not be assumed that there is no need for further inquiry; new information on new levels of sophistication may soon signal the need for a further reconstruction” (p.180). Each time I have read my analysis, or have had others read it, I have experienced the desire to “recycle” my construction of the narrative, to employ Guba and Lincoln’s term (p.174).

6. As my method for this study, I have engaged in the iterative processes of the constructive inquiry of decoding a television text that is pedagogic in intent and didactic in tone, and although I have been able to move procedurally to the construction of a final chapter for my dissertation, I know that my inquiry into Mister Rogers’ pedagogy and how it may inform existing tel literacy frameworks must continue beyond this dissertation.

2.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The unfinished nature of my inquiry may be viewed as a limitation of my study. However, drawing from Guba and Lincoln's (1989) explanation of an inquiry product that emerges from this kind of study, I have presented in my dissertation "the most informed and sophisticated construction that is possible to develop in this context, at this time" (p.179). I have attempted to ground my study in feedback on my analysis that I have received from a number of people who are familiar with Mister Rogers' work. I showed my analysis in process to other educators, to students, to parents, all of whom remembered watching *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as children. "Over time," as Guba and Lincoln observe, "and especially as successive respondents are asked to comment on and critique constructions already developed, a joint construction begins to emerge about which consensus can begin to form" (p.179).

Of course, the person that could offer the firmest grounding toward my objective of constructing consensus is Fred Rogers himself. Fred Rogers is missed for many reasons. I write this because I do not want to seem insensitive to the profound sadness that his passing has evoked when I claim that my inability to show my narrative analysis to him is a study limitation. However, I have, in part, grounded my analysis from the feedback of associate producer Hedda Sharapan, who worked closely with Rogers on the production of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Sharapan has an M.S. in Child Development from the University of Pittsburgh and has been with Rogers' nonprofit company Family Communications, Incorporated, for more than forty years. Drawing from the guidance of Guba and Lincoln (1989), I have relied on her input of what feels right and what feels wrong about the way I have interpreted "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning," as well as the discourses associated with Mister Rogers' work, through and beyond my theoretical lens.

I recognize that as a respondent the associate producer of *Neighborhood* includes subjectivities that inform her reading of my analysis. Her emic perspective of Rogers' work, at times, has differed from my etic perspective, and I have negotiated these differences as part of the process of my narrative reconstructions. My reconstructions also would have been informed valuably by the work of other researchers in the field that had looked at Rogers' work in the same way I have for this study. Unfortunately, most of the studies that have been done on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* have been focused on the psycho-social development of children. This has been a study limitation. However, I am hopeful that when I present my analysis to the field:

The joint construction that emerges (will) reflect the emic (insider) view as well as the etic (outsider) perspective. Judgments of that joint construction's fit, work, relevance, and modifiability must be made by inquirer (me) and respondents (members of the field) jointly. Thus design, emergent theory, and "findings" will all represent a unique combination of inquirer and respondent values and judgments—truly collaborative. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.182)

With the presentation of my analysis I hope to inspire a true collaboration of efforts among members of the field who are interested in scrutinizing further Rogers' work for the purpose of advancing teleliteracy pedagogy in educative and humanizing ways. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) contend, this ongoing collaboration of the processes of discovery and verification will occur among researchers who are open to the iterative and interactive conditions of uncovering more of the unknowns rather than looking for that one thing that can be known. Therefore, consistent with a Freirean (1993/1970) stance, I acknowledge myself (the researcher) and my work as unfinished and uncompleted, and I regard this awareness of my own limitations, like Freire, as an exclusively human manifestation in which the very roots of education exist.

2.3 SUBJECTIVITIES BROUGHT TO THE STUDY

I further acknowledge my humanness as a researcher in the subjectivities, or what is more appropriately expressed as the tacit knowledge I bring to the study. I am guided by Guba and Lincoln's (1989) discussion of this kind of subjectivity that exists within a constructivist. They write:

There is nothing mysterious or mystical about tacit knowledge. We all know more than we can say. An expert automobile mechanic may know little of the thermodynamic principles on which an engine is based, but very often by "listening" to it can determine what needs to be repaired. The same is true of the experienced cardiologist listening to the heart sounds of a patient. Most of the readers of this book are likely to be educationists. Most of them can walk into a school building that they have never seen before, and, after spending a bit of time there, even without talking to anyone, can answer questions like, "Is the principal of this school authoritarian?" or "Are the children in this school happy?" or "Is the science curriculum up to date?" How do all of these people—the mechanic, the cardiologist, the educationist—come to their conclusions? Ask them and they probably won't be able to tell you. But you can rely on their judgment, for it will more often than not be right. It is precisely this same tacit understanding of a situation that serves the constructivist in the beginning stages of an inquiry, and it is exactly this tacit knowledge that is ruled irrelevant by the positivist on the grounds of its subjectivity. (p.177)

I have chosen the challenges associated with teleliteracy education as my research interest because of my concern for how young people seem to understand real life based largely on the television shows they watch. I could hear the influences of popular television shows in

thematic literary discussions in which I engaged my high school students, in their hallway conversations and locker talk, and in conversations I had with graduates that would visit during my preparation periods or after school. I am worrying presently that my younger daughter, a first-year college student, has chosen biology as her major because she has been an aficionado of *Grey's Anatomy* since the show's inception more so than because she had been successful at and interested in the science classes she had taken throughout high school. Consistent with Guba and Lincoln's (1989) framework, I was encouraged to begin my journey toward formal inquiry on the topic of teleliteracy education by doing some purposive sampling.

Four years ago, as a journal writing assignment, I asked my tenth grade students at the time to respond to the question, "What is the real world?" I was intrigued by all of their responses, but I include three of the most telling. One student replied, "The real world is in music, movies, everywhere. Even magazines. Because they show how people gossip. That's part of the real world too." Another wrote, "One idea is that the world just started a second or minute ago and all your memories were just put there in your head. I know that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* used this to give Buffy a sister who was this key made of energy used to open the gate to other worlds." She added, "I think that's a little much, but it is TV." A third suggested, "I think the real world is right here all around us. The time and place we live in is part of the real world. And it's also on MTV." These responses in particular, and a number of others suggested that television was having some influence on the way my tenth grade students at the time had been thinking about their understandings of the real world.

I conducted another purposive sampling with a fellow English teacher. We invited our junior and senior students to our school's large group instruction area and showed them a few video clips we had extracted from an ABC special that had run recently starring Nick Lachey and

Jessica Simpson. After we showed the clips, we posed the question, “Is this real?” For the next hour, we did not speak again as the facilitators; the students had a lot to say about how this piece of television spoke to their understanding of real life. The conversation, which I captured on videotape, was at times contentious and a bit chaotic, but it was also clearly passionate and sincere.

I enter this study of Fred Rogers’ work with a tacit understanding that young people want to talk about television. I also contend through my tacit knowledge of young people as a parent to two college-aged daughters and as a high school teacher of sixteen years that young people *need* to form healthier constructs about the world in which they live. Frequently in the newspapers and on television appear stories about rampant student absenteeism, drug and alcohol use, violence and bullying, student apathy, and achievement deficiencies. Many of these student behaviors seem to be coupled with indifference to the consequences. Not caring or even trying to be aware of how their behavior affects others, many students seem to operate from a code which upholds that being a student is license to be deviant, no matter who or how others are impacted by the deviance.

Even more disconcerting is that this indifference also affects the ways many students seem to disregard the concern for human life around the world. As examples, based on the researcher’s experience in public education, many young people seem immune to the rising death toll in the Middle-East, or to the genocide happening in Darfur, or to any deaths occurring in the world because of the overwhelming conditions of starvation and disease. Although the television industry can not be blamed for infecting the attitudes of many young people living today, it nevertheless should bear some of the social responsibility for trying to humanize their codes in order to make the future world, which they will be responsible for shaping, better.

I also bring my subjective view of television to this research experience because I have worked in the industry. I was a news anchor/reporter for WOUB radio and television in Athens, Ohio. I was an intern in the talent department for NBC's *Late Night with David Letterman*, and I worked with television actors and producers of Hanna Barbera animated productions as a junior publicist for a New York City entertainment public relations company. From my work in all of these positions I have been able to acquire some tacit understanding of why the television industry operates more in its own interests than in the interests of its viewers. From my pre-dissertation discussions with the associate producer of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, as well as the many experiences with the series in which I had engaged as a child, I formed a tacit understanding that the objectives, format, and structure of *Neighborhood* differed from other types of television in which I had been directly involved.

My intention through this study is not to celebrate either Fred Rogers or *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. At times, I admit, the language of my analysis may lean in this direction because I was a faithful viewer of this show as a child and as an adult with my young children. I have tried to temper this subjectivity so that it does not infringe upon the purpose and significance of my inquiry. I believe Rogers' work, when examined through a strong theoretical lens, can strengthen existing pedagogical frameworks in teleliteracy education so that more students can experience opportunities to speak about their understandings of the real world in educative and humanizing praxes of teaching and learning.

In the next chapter, I review the discourses of my theoretical framework along with the relevant writings associated with the pedagogy of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and its connection with existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks.

3.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My review of literature begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework for this study. To construct my frame I have merged Dewey's (1938, 1944/1916) theory on what makes a learning experience educative with Freire's (1993/1970, 1998) ideas on what makes a pedagogical praxis mutually humanizing. Staying within this frame I proceed in this chapter to highlight the objectives and caveats of existing pedagogical teleliteracy frameworks. This groundwork facilitates my review of the discourses that speak to the coherence of Rogers' work to Dewey, Freire, and existing teleliteracy frameworks.

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TEACHING AND LEARNING AS HUMANIZING AND EDUCATIVE, A THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE WRITINGS OF DEWEY AND FREIRE

Freire's (1993/1970) discourse on a praxis of mutual humanization and Dewey's (1938) discourse on a theory of educative experience provide a useful framework for critiquing "Mister Rogers' Talks about Learning" and other discourses that speak to the pedagogy of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Both theorists view learning as an active, dynamic, and ongoing process. Dewey's (1938) notion that educative learning requires the learner to be actively growing in each experience relates to Freire's (1993/1970) contention that the roots of education

take hold when learners develop an awareness of their incompleteness and acknowledge that they are perpetually ensconced in the processes of becoming. “Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis,” according to Freire (p.65).

Teachers are responsible for drawing from their wisdom and experience to steer a learner’s growth in positive directions, according to Dewey (1938). To guide growth the teacher, Freire (1993/1970) contends, should problem-pose with the learner; Freire denounces the banking concept of education and its practice of depositing information into the learner’s brain. Furthermore, Freire contends that problem-posing should occur in democratic ways. Dewey (1938) also contends that teachers should exercise their authority minimally as they speak and act “in behalf of the interest of the group, not as an exhibition of personal power” (p.54). When democratic teaching and learning, faith, and love are part of the praxis, Freire (1993/1970) observes, then mutual trust and authentic dialogue between the teacher and learner emerge. In this kind of humanizing environment, claims Freire, a learner’s creative power is cultivated rather than inhibited or anesthetized. When learners truly dialogue with one another in the praxis of mutual humanization, they embrace silence, listening, and humility as values. They accept that “self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue” and therefore are open to the contributions of others who become their “partners in naming the world” (p.71). Freire adds that mutual trust and faith in humankind emerge in this collaborative learning environment in which no person is elite. Rather, all learners believe in joining with others in order to “learn more than they know now” (p.71).

This Freirean notion relates to Dewey’s (1938) belief that through reflection on their educative experiences learners begin to develop a social responsibility. They begin to resist impulsive thinking and instead consider their decisions and how their decisions affect others

before they act. For both Dewey and Freire, the development of this attitude helps people to achieve true freedom and liberation in their learning.

In the next sections I discuss each of these related concepts of my theoretical framework more in depth.

3.2 LEARNING IS ACTIVE, DYNAMIC AND ONGOING

An educative experience, Dewey (1938) explains, results from the learner's ability "to frame purposes, to judge wisely, (and) to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them" (p.64). According to Dewey, "the educative process can be identified with growth when that is understood in terms of the active participle, *growing*" (p.36). Learners are *growing* from an educative experience, Dewey contends, when they are reconstructing their intellectual, moral, and physical development in future experiences. Dewey refers to this reconstruction as the continuity of experience; it is for Dewey the primary discriminator between learning experiences that are educative and those that are miseducative.

Freire (1993/1970), likewise, regards learning as an active process. "As unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality," Freire contends, every learner is in the process of "becoming" (p.65). The awareness of being uncompleted, which Freire regards as an exclusively human manifestation, roots education in a transformational and ongoing reality. By living in this process, Freire theorizes, human beings experience an emergence of consciousness; they apprehend that the problems before them interrelate to new challenges, new understandings, and a strengthened awareness that "the unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity"

(p.65). As Dewey explains, “In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience. (p.47)

3.3 TRUE TEACHING IS STEERING STUDENT GROWTH BY PROBLEM- POSING WITH THEM, NOT BANKING KNOWLEDGE IN THEM

Dewey (1938) charges the teacher with the responsibility of directing teleliteracy experiences toward educative rather than miseducative paths. According to Dewey, educators must assess each teleliteracy experience before and as it is happening and steer student growth in the right direction because the students do not have enough mature experiences to do it for themselves. He adds:

It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. There is no point in his being more mature if, instead of using his greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his insight. (p.38)

A teacher that does not judge and direct the teleliteracy experience is disloyal to the principle of experience, itself, according to Dewey (1938). Furthermore, Dewey contends:

The disloyalty operates in two directions. The educator is false to the understanding that he should have obtained from his own past experience.

He is also unfaithful to the fact that all human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication. The mature person, to put it in moral terms, has no right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever

capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has given him. (p.38)

On the other hand, Dewey (1938) cautions educators not to dictate learning to their students. He explains that children show a willingness to let someone lead if they believe the leader is adding value to the group as a whole. “They resent the attempt at dictation,” Dewey warns (p.55). Freire (1993/1970) theorizes that learners achieve this kind of social awareness by developing “their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves” (p.64). Problem-posing education rather than banked learning facilitates this development, claims Freire.

Banked education, which tends to be the way most people think about teaching and learning, explains Freire, is depositing information into students’ brains as if they were receptacles to be filled by the teacher. In banked education, students receive information, memorize it, and repeat it. They become collectors and cataloguers of the knowledge they receive and store, and each student learns individually rather than collaboratively. The banking concept, Freire adds, assumes that human beings and the world in which they live are dichotomous; it assumes that people are in but not with the world or others.

Problem-posing education, on the other hand, does not dichotomize the teacher from the student, nor does it separate either of them from the world, according to Freire. Rather, the problem-posing concept exists in “acts of cognition, not transferals of information” (p.60). It involves dialogic communication between the teacher and the students; they are, Freire explains, co-investigators of problems posed by the teacher, who is acting as a partner in learning with the students rather than a depositor of knowledge into the students. Problem-posing affirms both the teacher and the student as beings that are in the process of becoming—“as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p.65)

By problem-posing, Freire adds, the educator embraces the emergence of consciousness in the learner and in himself because he “constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students” (pp.61-62). This consciousness emerges in the educational praxis of mutual humanization, which Freire describes as “a quest” (p.56) for mutual trust among the teacher and the students that is founded upon faith, hope, love, and humility. These conditions of mutual humanization engender authentic dialogue among and foster creativity within all learners engaged in the praxis. Authentic dialogue, Freire theorizes, exists when learners commit to a faith in humankind, a hope in the communion with others to explore constantly their own incompleteness, “a profound love for the world and for people” (p.70), and an eschewing of arrogance throughout the process of communing with others to learn about themselves and the world.

Dialogue between teachers and learners also requires silence and listening, according to Freire (1998). Freire stresses that “the importance of silence in the context of communication is fundamental” (p.104). Silence is a discipline that needs to be developed, Freire adds; it is an acknowledgment by speakers that they are not the only ones with ideas and opinions, and that what they have to say is not the “one long truth...anxiously awaited for by the multitudes” (p.105). Instead, Freire continues, speakers truly engaged in dialogue recognize that the persons listening also have something to say. If speakers are not willing to listen to those that are listening to them, Freire contends, then the speakers’ “talking, no matter how correct and convincing, will not fall on receptive ears” (p.105).

The bank-clerk educator, unlike the problem-posing educator does not observe the values of silence, listening, and humility, Freire (1993/1970) suggests. The bank-clerk educator also does not realize that there is no true security in his

hypertrophied role, that one must seek to live with others in solidarity. One cannot impose oneself, nor even merely co-exist with one's students. Solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which such an educator is guided fears and proscribes communication. (pp.57-58)

Developing a habit of the proscribed communication that results from the banking concept also makes learning miseducative, from a Deweyan (1938) perspective. Habit, according to Dewey, means that every experience tried and undergone changes the one that acts and undergoes, and "whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences" (p.35). Developing bad habits would involve more than students adopting fixed ways of learning; more profoundly, Dewey claims, it would affect adversely the formation of their emotional and intellectual attitudes, as well as their sensitivities to all future learning experiences. Overly cynical attitudes and insensitivities could develop more from what Dewey refers to as a cause than a reason. Consequently, Dewey warns, students will not *grow* in the direction that promotes growth in general.

Optimally, explains Dewey (1938), learners make future decisions based on what they have experienced already, not simply because they have been taught to think this way or have been given cause to think this way from "the press, the pulpit, the platform, and our laws and law-making bodies" (p.34). Educational experiences designed to instill cause in learners are miseducative, according to Dewey. Rather, he theorizes, an experience should foster in learners reasons why they prefer one decision or way of thinking over another.

Cultivating in learners habit based on reason over cause also facilitates educative experiences that lead to collateral learning, according to Dewey. Collateral learning occurs when educative experiences create in learners lasting desires to consider more than just the particular

thing under study; learners develop an attitude of drawing from present experiences “all that there is in it for (them) at the time in which (they have) it” (p.49). Collateral learning helps to prepare students for future experiences. According to Dewey, “using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself” because what happens is that the “actual preparation for the future is missed or distorted” (p.49). To make preparation educative, Dewey explains, devoting attentive care to making the experience worthwhile is essential.

The notion of preparation, however, as it is often applied in education can be treacherous, Dewey warns, because an assumption is often made by educators that merely the acquisition of a certain amount of study “will automatically constitute preparation for their right and effective use under conditions very unlike those in which they were acquired” (p.47). For an expansive continuity of experience to occur, Dewey contends, the engagement must not take place in isolation and must facilitate opportunity for collateral learning “in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes” and the “desire to go on learning” (p.48).

3.4 EDUCATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES CULTIVATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND A “STOP AND THINK” ATTITUDE TOWARD DECISION-MAKING

The notion of living richly in a present experience as a condition for having an expansive continuity of experience dovetails into two additional conditions that Dewey (1938) regards as essential for educative learning experiences—the learner’s development of social responsibility and a “stop and think attitude” toward decision-making (p.64). To be deemed educative, according to Dewey, an experience must engender social responsibility within the learner.

Within the experience the learner must be aware that an individual action is affected by all of the interacting parts. “The moving spirit of the whole group” establishes order and control, not the facilitator or any one individual in the group, according to Dewey (1938, p.54).

What this kind of educative experience leads to then is profound—the achievement of what Dewey calls the freedom to “stop and think” (p.64) before making decisions, to avoid acting only on impulse, to judge carefully, and to take full responsibility for one’s actions and how these actions affect others. Facilitating opportunities for students to become better decision-makers based on the development of their skills to judge things more carefully and to consider how their actions ultimately affect others seems to be a common objective of the existing frameworks for teleliteracy education that I discuss in the next section.

3.5 ESTABLISHING EXISTING TELELITERACY PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS WITHIN THE THEORETICAL FRAME

A highlighting of existing frameworks suggests that teleliteracy education already has solid grounding that seems consistent with both Dewey (1938, 1944/1916) and Freire (1993/1970, 1998). Masterman (1989), for example, has created a teleliteracy framework based on the premise that television makers actively construct meaning and do not merely reflect reality. Specifically, his framework is to have students first determine the sources of these constructions, then examine the dominant techniques and coding that persuade them that these representations are true, the values that are implicit in these representations, and the ways in which these media constructions are read and received by various audiences. The objective of this framework is to

develop self-confidence and critical maturity in students so they are able to judge future television texts they experience more critically.

Masterman also encourages teachers not to “degenerate” the teleliteracy engagement into a “stultifying and laborious accumulation of facts, ideas, and information” or “dehumanizing” (p.25) exercises that amount to nothing more than busy work. He also insists that students should not be made to dutifully reproduce the teacher’s ideas. Rather, Masterman calls for a non-hierarchical framework that is dependent not on the teacher’s lead but on the group’s dialogue. The teacher is to act both as facilitator and participant in the investigation of underlying assumptions about the text being analyzed.

Facilitating discussion in non-hierarchical ways becomes especially important to a democratic society, Willis and Carden (2004) stress, whose media are owned by corporations that favor competition, “assign celebrity status to rich and powerful players in the competition game, and with such status...mould ideas of life achievement in the young and not so young” (p.5). In such societies, space needs to be made for students to challenge and confront media images in an arena of shared power, according to Willis and Carden. Students must be able to take part in the “democracy-enhancing pedagogy” (p.7) of visioning, in which they develop the ideals of equity and inclusivity, and grounding, in which they develop compassion and empathy by imagining themselves in others’ feelings and experiences.

Sharing the desire to ground students in a critical framework for engaging popular media and specifically television, Hobbs (2006/1994) has created a teleliteracy program called “Know TV.” Developed in conjunction with Time Warner and The Discovery Channel, the framework of “Know TV” is based on viewers asking themselves nine critical questions when they engage television: 1) What genre is this? 2) What is the producer’s purpose? 3) How does the

producer's purpose shape the content? 4) How are language, sound and images used to manipulate the message? 5) What techniques are used to enhance the authenticity of the message? 6) What techniques are used to enhance the authority of the message? 7) How do different viewers interpret the same message differently? 8) What techniques are used to involve or engage the viewers in the message? 9) Who makes money from this message?

Schools in some states have utilized and extended the "Know TV" framework, according to Hobbs (2004). Schools in Texas and Maryland, for example, have afforded students opportunities to move from media analysis to media creation by budgeting for still photography, video production, graphic design software, documentary production, scriptwriting, and Web site design as part of the core curriculum. Still, despite the developmental nature of this framework, Hobbs laments, media literacy is far from established curriculum across U.S. schools.

Potter (2001), likewise, suggests a developmental framework for teliteracy education. First, he contends students must acquire rudimentary skills like being able to recognize audio-visual symbols, patterns, and surface meanings. Then, students can engage advanced teliteracy processes and develop skills in two ways: message focusing and message extending. Message focusing requires students to compare and contrast, evaluate and abstract, assess accuracy and usefulness, compare messages with their own knowledge and experience, and assess worth. Message extending asks students to consider relationships between messages and their understandings of life, perhaps thinking of ways to synthesize messages formed from new constructs that they may determine collaboratively.

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) in Los Angeles, California, like Potter (2001) and Hobbs (2005/1994) also promotes a developmental framework for media literacy, including teliteracy. At the core of its CML MediaLit Kit are Five Key Questions the learner is to ask

when engaging a media (including a television) text: 1) Who created this 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? (CML, 2006; Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p.25-27). Learning to ask these questions, Thoman and Jolls (2004) claim, “is like learning to ride a bike or to swim; it takes practice and usually is not mastered the first time out” (p.24), but eventually citizen empowerment results from this kind of training.

By engaging in the CML framework, citizens are taking a Freirean (1993/1970) approach to power by developing critical awareness. The goal, Thoman and Jolls (2004) claim, is to promote healthy skepticism rather than cynicism, which comes from framework that is designed not to provide answers but rather to stimulate more questions. They learn to employ with each media engagement what Thoman refers to as an empowerment education spiral, an iterative process of awareness, analysis, reflection, and action (Bergsma, 2004).

The principal objective of the empowerment education spiral, according to Thoman and Jolls (2004), which also applies to other existing tel literacy frameworks, is to put students in charge of their own learning by making them active, not passive television viewers for life. Dewey (1944/1916) claims, however, that any educative experience should include both an active and passive element. As Livingstone (2004) observes, tel literacy education is skill-based; it involves what Dewey called the active experience of *trying* to read and write “the language of images and sounds just as we have always taught them to read and write the language of printed communication” (Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p.19). To act on an experience by trying, Dewey (1944/1916) adds, necessarily leads to the passive experience of *undergoing* consequences; “we do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return” (p.139).

Dewey would argue that a teleliteracy experience is only educative if the undergoing experience has value. If the passive experience arrests or distorts the growth of other experiences, or if it produces in the student callousness, lack of responsiveness, or insensitivity, then Dewey would assess the experience as miseducative.

The possibilities for miseducative experiences occurring from teleliteracy engagement are noted by teleliteracy framers and advocates, themselves. Willis and Carden (2004) note the difficulties of engendering empathy, sensitivity, and compassion for others among students that are already enamored with a media that makes competition, wealth, and fame at any cost so attractive. Rogow (2004) adds that when media literacy pedagogy concentrates too heavily on ways that media manipulate young people, then students tend to become more cynical than skeptical. Giroux (1997) observes that adults already have confused and disenfranchised many young people by celebrating them as symbols of hope for a kinder and gentler world while at the same time criticizing them as threats to the existing social order. If teachers approach teleliteracy framework with the democratic imagining that Willis and Carden advocate, then they must also be willing not to be judgmental of student views shared in that democratic space.

3.6 ESTABLISHING MISTER ROGERS' PEDAGOGY THROUGH THE THEORETICAL LENS OF DEWEY AND FREIRE

The consistency of stance, framework, and shared inclusivity on which viewers can rely when they make a television visit to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is largely what makes the teleliteracy experience of each program potentially educative. As Zelevansky (2004) notes, Rogers'

method is to ask questions, encourage speculation, and advance interpretations that encourage his young audiences to recognize that careful thinking and looking can lead to both understanding and action. Each viewer sitting before the screen on a given day is invited to participate as a sensing, reasoning individual with potential....The wonder of living is tied to the ability to imagine, conceive, and manifest ideas and to learn from, contemplate, and revel in the work and conception of others. (p.197)

In Freirean (1993/1970) language, Rogers' pedagogy is an enactment of mutual humanization cultivated through problem-posing. In the *Neighborhood* no prescription for learning exists, for as Freire writes, "Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (p.29). Although he was a Presbyterian minister, Rogers never preached or told viewers how they should live their lives. Instead, Rogers lived the values of his program in the way he treated people with courtesy, compassion, and empathy as a caring citizen and everyone's neighbor. As Zoba (2000, March 6) explains, the Presbyterian church of the United States ordained Fred Rogers as an evangelist who was to minister to children and families through his work in television. She adds:

He does not bring evangelism in its churchly sense to this calling, and neither does he introduce religious themes in his programs. But his daily neighborhood visits with the children sow seeds that awaken something basic in their hearts. It is hidden growth....Mister Rogers, in his silent, subtle....way, rescues children from a world that would too soon warp their souls. He summons them to a special place where trust arises and does not disappoint. Hearts come alive, awakened by unconditional

acceptance....Mister Rogers calls it “loving someone into existence.” And *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* is his way of answering God’s call. (p.40)

The way Rogers answered the volumes of letters he received from his viewers further attested to his commitment to this calling. He responded personally to as many letters written by viewers as possible (Bishop, 2003; Poniewozik, 2003; Sharapan, 2002). Rogers’ letters are a manifestation of how he attended to his viewers and to his dialogic relationship with all of them. For as Freire (1993/1970) asks, “How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others?” (p.71).

In this spirit of Freirean humility, Rogers addressed *Neighborhood’s* success by stating genuinely that he was not prepared for any of it (Bishop, 2003) and by always thinking of *Neighborhood* not as an Emmy award winning “program” or “show” but as a television visit, according to Sharapan (2002). Rogers has claimed that the success of every television visit was experiential—a process of patience (Bishop, 2003). Patience in learning is a virtue that Rogers has worked into the slow pace of the program, which affords viewers time to reflect on and respond to everything that Mister Rogers and his cast and characters say and do. In *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, stories unfold over an entire week of half-hour episodes so viewers can experience the themes of the story from different perspectives. Viewers also can better appreciate that many real life problems are rarely solved in a day, yet alone in a half-hour (Sharapan, 2002). Rogers (1994) elaborates on the value of patience in learning, saying:

It may be that the most important mastery a child achieves early on is the mastery of the patience and persistence that learning requires, along with the ability to expect and accept mistakes and the feelings of disappointment they may bring. (p.90)

What Rogers describes is what Dewey (1944/1916) regards as true learning from experience. The learner has to be willing to go backward and forward in making connections between actions and consequences, whether they be pleasurable or painful for self or others. Dewey calls this experimenting with the world to see what it is like; trying and undergoing are the empirical processes the learner employs to discover connections between things. The fallacy of some pedagogical frameworks, Dewey admonishes, is to assume that enough prior experience exists within students to assume that they can connect with ready-made subject matter. Some frameworks, Dewey chides, are “so anxious to get at intellectual distinctions...that they tend to ignore—or reduce—the immediate crude handling of the familiar material of experience, and to introduce pupils are once to material which expresses the intellectual distinctions which adults have made” (p.153-154).

Freire (1993/1970) associates these cruder kinds of frameworks with “the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p.53). Contrary to Rogers’ pedagogy, the banking concept, Freire explains, assumes that learning is a gift to bestow on those who know nothing. Rogers, on the other hand, has been interested in what children have brought to each television visit (Sharapan, 2002). In Freirean (1993/1970) language, Mister Rogers is not a “bank-clerk” educator (p.57). In Deweyan (1938) fashion, Mister Rogers steers the growth of his viewers subtly. That “Mister Rogers is an engaged teacher; a parental figure, not an adult playmate,” which Zelevansky (2004, p.196) notes, is consistent with Dewey’s expectations. Rogers (1994) has claimed, however, that he constructed the text of *Neighborhood* for “all of the children—of any age—who have found our ‘Neighborhood’ and have been willing to spend time growing right along with me” (p.v). Through this claim Rogers affirms that his television neighborhood

is democratically structured; however, Rogers also believes firmly that young children need parents and other caregivers to guide them in understanding what they experience on television, according to Sharapan (2002). She adds that Rogers has encouraged parents and other caregivers to watch *Neighborhood* with their children and to continue the discussion or to clarify what may have been confusing or misunderstood from the text.

As Zelevansky (2004) contends, the nature of Rogers' pedagogy is radical and his use of television form strategic. For example, Mister Rogers looks directly into the camera when he talks to his viewers, but his objective is not to instruct; rather, as Zelevansky explains, he is establishing intimacy, trust, and relationship with his viewers. Also, Mister Rogers makes use of a variety of presentational devices, but he is not a propagandist; he mediates (often with questions) space, bodies, symbols, and other textual constructs with the anxieties, misunderstandings, and fears the viewer brings to the visit, according to Zelevansky.

His mediation is meant to be respectful to his viewers (Sharapan, 2002). Mister Rogers (2001) has regarded the space between himself and his viewers to be hallowed ground. He has been careful not to *impose* teaching on his viewers. He writes:

The older I get, the more convinced I am that the space between communicating human beings can be hallowed ground. Young children sometimes look sheepish when they confide in us, as though they already suspect there's something amiss in their interpretation of the world; and have you noticed how often older children, even teenagers, will start a confidence with a question like "Promise you won't laugh if I tell you?" People have said "Don't cry" to other people for years and years, and all it has ever meant is "I'm too uncomfortable when you show your feelings: Don't cry." I'd rather have them say, "Go ahead and

cry. I'm here to be with you.” When you combine your own intuition with a sensitivity to other people’s feelings and moods, you may be close to the origins of valuable human attributes such as generosity, altruism, compassion, sympathy, and empathy. (www.pbskids.org/rogers/all_ages/thoughts4.htm, paragraphs 1-4)

Rogers developed his intuitiveness and sensitivity by committing himself to an on-going study of children, explains Sharapan (2002). Not only had he studied at the graduate school of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh, but he had worked directly with children as part of his training and had listened to what they “were saying—through their words, their play, and their behavior” (p.31). Rogers had what Dewey (1938) called “that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning” (p.39). Rogers knew, as Poniewozik (2003) points out, that many adults remember childhood as a time of carefree and innocence, but in reality, for many kids childhood “is a time of roiling passions, anguish and terror” (p.72). Therefore, Rogers’ pedagogical strategy, according to Zelevansky (2004), was to make the *Neighborhood* a “sanctuary” that never denied “the commonplace anxieties and misunderstandings of young children who make up the audience” (p.197). This uniquely dedicated concern for what viewers bring to the teleliteracy experience of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* substantially sets Rogers’ pedagogical framework apart from other existing frameworks.

Rogers’ radical pedagogy is meant to humanize the viewers as it humanizes the host. Rogers’ concept of learning space as sanctuary is built upon a foundation of faith, hope, love, and humility, to use Freire’s (1993/1970) words, all of which lead to a relationship of mutual trust between himself and the viewers that he attends to carefully and continuously. Yet, as

Zelevanky (2004) notes, Rogers' approach should not be oversentimentalized. As Freire (1998) suggests, which seems true of Rogers, an openness to caring for the well being of children is a manifestation of an openness to life itself and to the "joy of living" (p.125). To learn is to continually search as unfinished beings; the joy is in the seeking, not the finding, Freire observes. The joy that Rogers engenders in his *Neighborhood* is a pedagogy of freedom, as Freire calls it—a stimulation of "decision making and responsibility, in other words, on experiences that respect freedom" (p.98).

Most of the existing frameworks for teleliteracy are structured, as Thoman and Jolls (2004) express, to put individuals in charge of their own learning or, in Freirean language to help them realize their own creative power. Dewey's (1938) continuity of experience principle would seem to agree with this objective. If a student's teleliteracy experience leads to subsequent teleliteracy experiences in which the student feels more in charge of the learning, then, it seems, the experience would have to be regarded as educative. These subsequent experiences are what Dewey refers to as collateral learning.

Collateral learning was an integral part of Rogers' framework, evidenced in part by the lyric to the song he sang at the close of every program.

It's such a good feeling to know you're alive.

It's such a happy feeling you're growing inside.

And when you wake up ready to say,

"I think I'll make a snappy new day."

It's such a good feeling, a very good feeling.

The feeling you know that I'll be back when the day is new,

And I'll have more ideas for you.

And you'll have things you'll want to talk about.

I will too. (Rogers, 2006, www.fci.org)

The last four lines of the lyric create a continuity of experience that the visit between Mister Rogers and his television neighbors will continue “when the day is new.” Collaterally, the lyric reminds viewers that they are growing, or in Freirean (1993/1970) language, “becoming” (p.65). This, according to Rogers’ lyric, is a “very good feeling.” The desire to continue learning stems from the way this feeling leads to more ideas to share and more things to talk about when the dialogue has the chance to continue.

Also in the closing song, Rogers’ code seems to be consistent with what Dewey (1938) refers to as the true meaning of educational preparation. Preparation, Dewey explains, can not be the controlling end; rather, the learner must take out of the present experience everything that is in it at the time of experience. Human beings know themselves to be unfinished, and this awareness roots education in the dynamic present rather than the static future (Freire, 1993/1970). When the future controls the learning, the preparation for the future is distorted or lost altogether. “It’s Such a Good Feeling” is an acknowledgment that the viewers are growing in the present; it is not a promise of *how* they will grow in the future. According to Dewey (1938), “this means that attentive care must be devoted to the conditions which give each present experience a worthwhile meaning” (p.49); this care is apparent in Rogers’ work.

As Mister Rogers carefully attends to his viewers’ participation in the experiences that occur in the *Neighborhood*, he tries to engender what in Deweyan language might be aptly named a social democracy. Existing teleliteracy frameworks seem to promote the social democracy Dewey describes, as well; however, extending from his framework metaphor of “neighborhood,” Rogers seems to construct what Dewey refers to as social organization, “an

organization in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute something, and in which the activities in which all participate are the chief carrier of control” (p.56). Implicitly working the principles of “neighborhood” into the show’s production elements

and never preaching a word about equality or diversity, Fred Rogers simply lived those principles by visiting with “neighborhood friends” and guests from varied racial, religious, national, and occupational backgrounds, and they ranged in life stage from infancy to old age. (Handler Spitz, 2003, p.B16)

This is not to suggest, as Dewey (1938) acknowledges, that every learner in the community will take an active role in group interaction. Some students, he realizes, perhaps because of injustices they have suffered from being of a certain race, religion, gender, nationality, or socioeconomic class, may be passive and docile; others may be contemptuous or unruly. Mister Rogers (2006) accounts for these members of the neighborhood, however, with words he says to the viewers—“You make each day special just by being you,” and lyric he sings to the viewers—“Would you be mine, could you be mine, won’t you be my neighbor?” during every television visit (www.fci.org). Consistent with Dewey’s (1938) notion of what cultivates social responsibility through learning experiences, Rogers seems to have constructed television narratives that foster genuine community life grounded in natural sociability and organized with careful thought and planning.

As Freire (1998) notes, however, an educator should reject the stance that he is not political because he embraces a pedagogy of mutual humanization. It is impossible to live in the world and be neutral, Freire claims. Rogers influences the political attitudes and practices of his viewers, but he does so in Freirean fashion by transmitting his “capacity to analyze, to compare, to evaluate, to decide, to opt, to break with...to be just, to practice justice, and to have a political

presence” (p.90) as both a beacon and a model for children and adults. Besides the difficult issues he has dealt with on *Neighborhood*, Rogers has produced television programming for parents and children on coping with the deaths of Robert Kennedy, Anwar Sadat, John Lennon, and the Jonesboro murders, as well as public service announcements for reassuring all of his neighbors that it was important to talk about the feelings associated with the Persian Gulf War and the September 11th attack on the World Trade Towers (Sharapan, 2002).

Like other material he has produced for television, Rogers does not inculcate his politics on his viewers. Rogers (1994) has acknowledged, however, that “one of the hardest things for young children to understand is that their actions have real consequences for others” (p.86). It takes time, he adds, for children to understand that their own worlds are not the whole world and that they must eventually accept responsibility for the choices they make. Noddings (1998) writes that human beings can not consider themselves to be fully free unless they also claim responsibility for all of the choices they make, with no assurances that these choices are right or wrong. She adds that this complete freedom results from a reflective personal identification with all living things, the attainment of which from Dewey’s perspective, Noddings contends, is not a human right or condition; rather, it is an achievement.

The achievement of ultimate freedom, claims Dewey (1938), is manifest in a “stop and think attitude” (p.64) to all decisions made in life. The final and perhaps most profound condition of an educative teliteracy experience from a Deweyan perspective would be that the learner develops and cultivates decision-making and careful judgment, not based on impulse but on reflection, social control, and social responsibility. “This is the essence of education,” Rogers (1994) believes—“to facilitate a person’s learning, to help that person become more in tune with his or her own resources so that he or she can use whatever is offered more fully” (p.85).

Perhaps one of the most powerful and accessible resources young people have today is television. Rogers believed in the medium enough to consider it his ministry (Bishop, 2003). Thoman and Jolls (2004) believe in media literacy education, including teleliteracy, enough to claim that it is “the engine for transforming the very nature of learning in a global multimedia environment” (p.21). To extend Thoman and Joll’s metaphor, my formal analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) has the potential to add a cylinder to that engine.

Before I present my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), I present a précis of the series and an overview to the programs I have studied.

4.0 PRECIS AND OVERVIEW

I present a précis of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and an overview of the five half-hour episodes that comprise the theme “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) as an orientation to the *Neighborhood* and to the specific production elements of the work under study. The précis provides a description of the series’ background, format, and structure, and the overview provides a description of the details of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) that informs the analysis I present in the subsequent chapters.

4.1 PRÉCIS OF MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

The longest running television series on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* includes more than 900 half-hour programs. Premiering on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) February 19, 1968, completing production in December 2000, and airing its last original episode on August 31, 2001, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has been produced and owned by Family Communications, Incorporated (FCI), a company located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, that was started by Rogers in 1971. Before 1971, Rogers called his company Small World Enterprises (Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007; Sharapan, 2002; TV IV, 2007).

Although Rogers passed away on February 27, 2003, after a battle with stomach cancer, his *Neighborhood* lives on because the series was constructed as a video library. Currently, the library, which is housed in the offices of FCI, consists of over 300 programs that were produced between 1979 and 2001. The library fulfills Rogers' post-production intention of airing a different *Neighborhood* program every weekday of the year without repeating an episode. FCI has also assembled VHS and DVD packages of the programs in order to keep the *Neighborhood* alive and accessible to children and their parents. *Neighborhood* episodes have aired for over forty years and continue to air in their morning or afternoon time slots to millions of viewers nationwide on most PBS stations. At its ratings peak *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was watched in over eight percent of households nationally, which is an achievement for a children's educational television program (DeFrancesco, 2003; Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007; Sharapan, 2002; the TV IV, 2006).

Both Small World Enterprises and Family Communications, Inc. have been affiliated with public television station WQED, Pittsburgh. WQED produced *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* until 1971, when Rogers formed FCI. For WQED, Rogers first developed *The Children's Corner* which introduced its audiences to the characters of Daniel Striped Tiger, King Friday XIII, Lady Elaine Fairchild, and X the Owl. Rogers was the puppeteer of these characters, a role he continued on *Neighborhood* along with being its host, which is one of the reasons why Mister Rogers does not appear in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, where his puppet characters reside (DeFrancesco, 2003; Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007).

His move from behind the scenes to in front of the camera was inspired by Fred Rainsberry, who headed children's television for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), according to Sharapan (2002). She writes, "Rainsberry gave Fred the courage to come out from

behind the scenes and talk directly with the children in front of the camera, as host of the forerunner of the Neighborhood, 'Misterogers' in 1963 and 1964" (p.34).

With Rogers as creator and Dr. Margaret McFarland from the University of Pittsburgh's child development program as chief consultant, *Neighborhood* strived to set itself apart from other children's television shows through its carefully structured format and content. For example, the pace of each program is noticeably slower than other children's television shows so that *Neighborhood* viewers can examine closely and experience carefully what they see and hear. The video is not crashed together or filled with jump cuts; instead, camera shots linger to allow viewers time to scrutinize a demonstration, process, object, or face. Typically in close-ups, Mister Rogers speaks directly to the camera for the purpose of developing intimacy with the viewer. He is a television friend to every viewer, a claim he reinforces in every episode by telling his viewers "you are special just because you're you" (Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007; Sharapan, 2002).

Letters sent to Mister Rogers (Rogers, 1996) affirm the individual connections he forms with his viewers. For example, five-year-old Danny writes, "I wish you accidentally stepped out of the tv into my house so that I could play with you" (p.10). Gordon, age four, asks, "Do you know me?" (p.6). Another four-year-old, Charlie, writes, "Can I please be with you in your house? I want to visit you. I'm good at thinking, coloring, singing, dancing, eating, and loving" (p.21). Rogers (1996) explains, "Just as our program is a 'television visit,' the mail is a 'letter visit.' It gives me a way to know my neighbors as real people and to make a more personal connection with them" (p.xi). That each viewer is an individual is never taken for granted in the writing and producing of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007).

Likewise, the importance children place in routines and simple tasks is not taken for granted in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. At the beginning of every episode, Mister Rogers walks through the door of his television house dressed in his work clothes—dress pants, dress shirt, dress shoes, sport coat, and tie—as if he has left the office to visit with his television friends for a half-hour. He always has some simple object of interest for the viewer that he has brought with him from his work, and he shares the details of why he has brought the object with him as part of the first dialogue of every episode. Whether he is sharing an object of interest, feeding his fish, cleaning up a room, or changing his sport coat and loafers to his cardigan and sneakers, Mister Rogers models, to use Freire's (1993/1970) words, "consciousness as consciousness of consciousness" (p.60). He wonders about little things out loud as he attends to little things; he poses his ideas as questions and gives his viewers time to think about how they would answer. He employs a dialogic strategy that Freire (1998) strongly advocates in his writings on teaching and learning—that silence in the context of communication is fundamental. In one program, for instance, Mister Rogers watches in silence as a minute passes on a timer in order to show his television neighbors how long a minute is.

The importance of demonstrating the length of a minute affirmed how well Rogers understood children. After this episode aired, Rogers received a letter from the mother of a five-and-a-half year old girl, Michelle, who suffered from an inoperable brain tumor. The thought of undergoing radiation treatment, Michelle's only option, made her cry inconsolably. The only way her parents could calm her was to tell her that the treatment would only last a minute. Through her tears, Michelle was able to ask, "What is a minute?" Looking at her watch, Michelle's mother started to sing "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," *Neighborhood's* opening number, stopping only to tell her daughter that a minute had passed before she could

finish the song. This comforted Michelle, and her mother had to sing the song to her every time she received the treatment. Michelle's story and the importance of what a minute meant to her became a *Neighborhood* opportunity for Mister Rogers to explore with all of his viewers the importance of coming to know how long a minute is (Rogers, 1996, pp.67-69).

In an effort to make these kinds of personal connections in *Neighborhood*, Mister Rogers addresses candidly in all of his programs childhood fears, concerns, and anxieties. Poniewozik (2003) writes that *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was "great and unique" because it dealt with "dark" issues that were important to its preschooler viewers (p.72). Sharapan adds that

in the caring atmosphere of the *Neighborhood*, (Rogers) doesn't sugar-coat or pretend everything is always fun, or demand that everyone always feel good. He never backs away from the tough parts of real life, but he models how to deal with those challenges in nurturing ways. (p.32)

Neighborhood themes have included death, divorce, separation, disease, the human body, and trips to the hospital, doctor, dentist, and barber for a first haircut (Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007).

One theme is spread across five sequential half-hour programs to allow viewers opportunities to consider each theme from multiple perspectives (Sharapan, 2002). People that visit Mister Rogers at his television house, or whom Mister Rogers visits at other sites in the *Neighborhood*, contribute some of these thematic perspectives. These special visits, as Rogers referred to them, were a carefully structured component that he included in every one of his five-episode themes. Through these special visits, "the life of the 'Neighborhood' unfolds stories of success and failure, or fulfillment and disappointment, and of the many ways that friends bring

one another new interest, help, empathy, or support” (Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007, p.2).

4.2 OVERVIEW OF “MISTER ROGERS TALKS ABOUT LEARNING”

The special visitors in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) are Eileen McNamara, a professional whistler, who demonstrates her talent for whistling songs and imitating birds. She stops by Mister Rogers’ house on her way to demonstrate her whistling expertise for students at the neighborhood school. Responding to Mister Rogers’ question of how she has been taught to whistle professionally, McNamara responds that she has learned from watching her father. Another special visitor Ella Jenkins demonstrates her talents of playing Hindi songs with a kazoo and in the process shares some Hindi phrases and their meanings with Mister Rogers and his television neighbors. Eric Kloss, a musician that is sight-impaired, who demonstrates and talks about his challenge of learning to master a new reading machine that he accesses in the neighborhood library, shares with Rogers and his television friends a talent for playing saxophone. When Kloss plays the saxophone, he is accompanied by *Neighborhood* music director and accomplished classical jazz pianist John Costa. A final visitor to the neighborhood in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) is Maggie Stewart, an interpreter for the hearing impaired, who demonstrates her ability to communicate in sign language as she shows Mister Rogers the contents of a box of toys he has requested from Mr. McFeely. Stewart visits Mister Rogers because she is helping Mister McFeely with the special delivery. Mister McFeely and his speedy deliveries are part of every *Neighborhood* program. A delivery man who in contrast to

Mister Rogers is always in a hurry, Mr. McFeely slows down his frenetic pace long enough to narrate a video on how construction paper is made that he delivers to Mister Rogers. Mister Rogers plays the video for his viewers on Picture Picture, which is really a piece of framed art that hangs prominently on the wall of his television house. To segue into the video clip the camera zooms into Picture Picture as the shot dissolves into the footage; the end of the video then dissolves into a close-up of the artwork in the frame of Picture Picture.

Throughout the five-episode story, McFeely delivers a number of learning materials to Mister Rogers; he adds another perspective to the theme of learning as he performs his neighborhood job. For example, in the process of learning a new computer system for expediting deliveries, McFeely's first delivery involves a mistake. He delivers a box of whistles that Mister Rogers has not ordered. Although he is meticulous about his job, Mr. McFeely demonstrates that even a skillful and knowledgeable delivery man has to overcome the challenges that emerge from learning new ways of doing things. McFeely appears in all five episodes of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), so he is able to share with Mister Rogers and the viewers his progress in learning the new delivery system throughout the story.

Although this does not happen in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), Mister McFeely's deliveries sometimes take him to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. A mostly puppet kingdom, the Neighborhood of Make-Believe is a fantasy place "where things can happen by magic or whimsy or wishing" (Sharapan, 2002, p.32). Mister Rogers invites his viewers to join him as he pretends in ways that extend to Make-Believe the theme of learning they explore together while visiting in Rogers' television house and neighborhood. To transition into Make-Believe Mister Rogers first beckons the Trolley and then says, "Let's pretend that..." so children have the concrete image of the Trolley AND they hear the concept of pretend as

something distinct from reality and yet clearly valued for what it offers children in the way of their own coping, problem solving, fun, and imagination” (p.32). Trolley’s arrival, which Rogers actually controls with a remote switch built into the set, is followed by the host’s suggestion for the start or continuation from previous episodes of a storyline that is related to the program theme. “The Trolley (then) serves as a ‘vehicle’ for the transition, traveling to the ‘Neighborhood of Make-Believe’ and back to reality” (Sharapan, 2002, p.32).

Human characters that are part of the Neighborhood of Make-Believe interact with and assist the puppet characters in resolving internal and external conflicts that are related to the program theme. In “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), for example, Robert Troll, who speaks in “trolltalk,” a double-talk that emulates a child’s experimentation with language and sounds (Family Communication, Incorporated, 2007), is charged with the task of taking a Neighborhood of Make-Believe census. Together, he and Lady Aberlin figure out the dilemma of how to have the Trolley sign his census form. Lady Aberlin, who regularly expresses sensitivity to the needs and feelings of all of her friends in the Neighborhood, helps Troll gather census information from the puppet population and solve conflicts that emerge during the process. Aberlin also conducts research in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) as directed by the king, a puppet character who is her uncle. She is seeking the source of strong winds that have been gusting in different areas of the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. Aberlin utilizes a wind machine to attempt to find the source, and when a gust registers she records the data of the place and time in which the gust occurs. Other adult characters that are human, Mayor Maggie and Chuck Aber, the mayor and associate mayor, respectively, of Make-Believe’s neighboring village of Westwood, assist the school students of the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, who are puppets, with their efforts to put together a field trip to various Make-Believe

sites. Mayor Maggie also facilitates the resolution of a major conflict that threatens to render meaningless all of the students' hard work in planning the details of the field trip.

The bond of trust between the adult and puppet characters in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe enables the puppets to share with their adult neighbors many of the same fears and anxieties that children watching *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* are likely to bring to the viewing experience (Family Communications, Incorporated, 2007). In "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), for example, X the Owl, who runs a printing press and whose hero is Benjamin Franklin, is afraid to admit to Lady Aberlin that he does not know how to whistle. Lady Aberlin acknowledges all of the other things that X can do well, which makes X feel better. The puppets that are students at the Neighborhood school, Daniel Tiger, Prince Tuesday, and Ana Platypus, also express anxieties they feel because an issue arises that threatens to cancel the field trip they have been planning enthusiastically for days. James Michael Jones, a puppet inventor, has created a learning machine that he alleges can be placed on the students' heads and can provide them with all of the knowledge they need. His machine, he contends, eliminates the need for their field trip, and his contention is supported by the mischievous and outspoken puppet antagonist and museum-go-round curator Lady Elaine Fairchild.

Lady Elaine Fairchild insists that the school students will be thrilled with Jones' learning machine in place of their field trip. The disappointed and confused students, however, seek guidance from the wise Mayor Maggie, who facilitates a democratic way for them to resolve the problem.

Support for resolving the students' conflict also comes from their puppet teacher, Harriet Cow, who shares in her pupils' enthusiasm for planning the field trip. Lady Aberlin and H.J. Elephant, the affable puppet-friend of Prince Tuesday, who in this series is learning how to

operate Lady Elaine's Boomerang Toomerang Soomerang, are also present to share in Tuesday's, Ana's and Daniel's delightedness in arriving at a resolution over the field trip dilemma. While at the school and only after much research, Lady Aberlin also discovers that the source of the wind gust is H.J. Elephant and his boomerang practice.

Lady Aberlin's discovery, like all of the learning that takes place in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe and in Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, requires both patience and process. Patience with problem-solving is built into the show's structure. According to Sharapan (2002), a single theme is carried across an entire week's worth of episodes because Rogers wanted viewers to experience that conflicts in life rarely are resolved in a half-hour. He also wanted children to experience each series' theme from different perspectives, Sharapan adds.

In the first episode of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), Lady Aberlin introduces her problem of finding the source of the wind gust but does not find the answer to her problem until the fifth episode of the story. Mister McFeely's effort to work with and learn the new computer system stretches throughout the entire series. The students of the Make-Believe school plan their field trip throughout the entire story and acquire their most profound insights on learning only in the last episode. Even the construction paper chain that Mister Rogers hangs across his living room in the third episode offers a reflection on the value of patience. Taking time in the third episode to demonstrate how a paper chain is made, Mister Rogers adds to the links of the chain that he has brought with him from his work. The viewer can see through his demonstration that constructing a paper chain takes time and patience. Toward the end of the third episode, Mister Rogers considers taking down the chain that he has strung across the room, but then he decides to let it hang for a couple more days. Looking at the chain with apparent

pride and seemingly admiring its handiwork, Rogers says, “I think I’ll leave the paper chain decoration up for our next visit.”

Mister Rogers unwaveringly recognizes and explores with his viewers the potential to learn from simple objects. Often, these objects are the ones he brings to share with his television friends during their visit. As he continues to sing “It’s a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” the show’s opening song, he sets the object of the day on a bench that sits beneath the railing of three steps that lead from the front door to the floor of the living room, and then he changes from his sport coat to his cardigan. He chooses a different colored cardigan from the closet for each day’s visit, then sits on the bench and changes from his work shoes to his sneakers. At the completion of the opening song, he welcomes his television neighbors and almost immediately introduces them to the object and its purpose.

The purpose of bringing each object relates to the five-episode theme in a meaningful way. In the first episode of “Mister Rogers’ Talks about Learning” (1992) for example, Mister Rogers uses a book of Greek letters and a legal pad he has brought with him to write the word “Agape,” which means “Love” in Greek. He shows the word to his television neighbors both at the beginning and the end of the day’s visit. In the second episode, he brings a piece of a vacuum cleaner hose that was going to be thrown out by one of his neighbors, but that he has “some ideas for.” He uses the vacuum hose as a pretend elephant’s trunk and as a tunnel through which to roll toy cars. A picture of Eric Kloss, the jazz musician who is sight-impaired, and a cassette tape that contains a demo of Kloss’ music are the objects he shares at the beginning of the fourth episode. These objects set up a visit to the neighborhood library where Kloss explains to Mister Rogers and his television friends the workings of a reading machine that Kloss is trying to master. Kloss also demonstrates his talent for playing the saxophone during the library visit.

In the last visit of the five-episode theme on learning, Mister Rogers brings different sizes of batteries. He uses them to show his viewers that some objects, like toys and flashlights, are powered by batteries, and that other objects, like the Trolley, are powered by electricity. He also uses a demonstration of how the batteries power a bunch of toys that Mr. McFeely has delivered to reflect with his television friends that “it takes *insides*” (the batteries) “and *outsides*” (the toys) “together to be whole and fine.” Mister Rogers adds to this reflection by singing “You’re Growing,” a song that suggests that his child viewers are developing both on the inside and outside.

Music plays a prominent role in the structure and format of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. In addition to singing “It’s a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” at the beginning of the every show, and “It’s Such a Good Feeling” at every program’s end, Mister Rogers sings in all of his episodes one or more of his repertoire of two hundred songs that he wrote and composed specifically for the *Neighborhood*. While singing the opening and closing songs, Mister Rogers ritualizes the swapping of his sport coat and loafers for his cardigan and sneakers, and vice versa. When singing any other song during a show, however, he looks directly into the camera throughout the entire piece. The camera begins at a medium shot and then slowly zooms into a close-up of the host as he sings. A few seconds of silence almost always follows these songs; the silence allows time for viewers to consider carefully the words that have just been sung before the dialogue continues. Mister Rogers’ lyrics typically speak to the feelings children are likely to bring to the television visit. The lyrics do not tell children what to do with these feelings; rather, they convey an awareness that these feelings exist and an empathy that these feelings can be difficult to manage.

In the song “You’re Growing,” for example, he expresses lyrically:

You used to creep and crawl real well

But then you learned to walk real well

There was a time you'd coo and cry

But then you learned to talk and My!

You almost always try

You almost always do your best

I like the way you're growing up.

In another song, "You've Got to Do It," he acknowledges that growing is not easy. He sings:

It's not easy to keep trying

But it's one good way to grow.

It's not easy to keep learning,

But I know that this is so.

When you've tried and learned you're bigger than you were a day ago.

It's not easy to keep trying,

But it's one way to grow.

You've got to do it

Every little bit, you've got to do it, do it, do it, do it.

And when you're through

You can know who did it

For you did it, you did it, you did it.

Knowing also that children have a lot of questions about themselves, others, and the world around them, Mister Rogers empathizes with their senses of wonder by singing “Did You Know?” He sings:

Did you know when you wonder you’re learning?
Did you know when you marvel you’re learning
About all kinds of wonderful,
All kinds of marvelous, marvelously wonderful things!

Mister Rogers addresses the difficulties that can often arise in trying to manage life as a child. According to Sharapan (2002), he does this by matching the show’s content with children’s needs and interests in a predictable format.

Children come to know what to expect. If they’re constantly wondering, “what’s next,” how can they give their full attention to “what’s now.” Carefully and thoughtfully, Fred Rogers helps children deal with the developmental concerns that they’re working on: separation, dealing with their own anger and aggression, fears that are imaginary or real, reality versus fantasy. He helps them know that their feelings are natural and normal, that there are constructive outlets, and that they can work on the good feeling of control. In the caring atmosphere of the *Neighborhood*, he doesn’t sugar-coat or pretend everything is always fun, or demand that everyone always feels good. He never backs away from the tough parts of real life, but he models how to deal with those challenges in nurturing ways. (p.32)

Although the conflicts he writes into “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) are not as dark and challenging as the ones he incorporates into some other themes, the content and

elements of this five-episode story on learning profoundly services a rich, theory-laden analysis of an encoded praxis of mutual humanization that emerges when viewers engage in an educative television visit to the *Neighborhood*.

In the next three chapters, I present my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) and its pedagogical framework. I decode the values of Rogers’ learning culture that he constructs in the praxis of mutual humanization.

5.0 AN EDUCATIVE PEDAGOGY OF DEMOCRATIC LEARNING AND MUTUAL TRUST IN A SAFE AND CARING SPACE

Freire (1998) asks, “What is to be thought and hoped of me as a teacher if I am not steeped in that other type of knowing that requires that I be open to caring for the well-being of my students and of the educative experience in which I participate?” (pp.124-125). In every thoughtfully and carefully placed detail, Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood, and specifically his television house, is meant to be a learning space that belongs to every viewer that takes part in the television visit. The learning space is meant to be a sanctuary where mutual trust is cultivated in faith and love, in caring relationships, and in attending to children and their feelings; it is a space where democratic learning experiences allow children to grow in the recognition of their own creativity and in the creativity of others.

In this chapter I describe the production details of the learning space that Mister Rogers has created for his viewers in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992). I focus particular attention on the familiar pieces of the sanctuary that belong to both the host and the viewers, and of the ways in which Mister Rogers attends to his viewers as he visits with them in the learning space. I also present letters that have been written by children and parents that support the dialogic relationship that exists between Mister Rogers and his viewers. The letters demonstrate ways in which viewers have expressed belongingness in the learning space of Mister Rogers’ television house as well as concern for Mister Rogers, himself. Freire’s (1993/1970) notion of

what constitutes true dialogue among learners seems to exist in the exchanges of these letters, as this chapter discusses. I also analyze the rituals that Mister Rogers includes in every episode of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) and the ways in which these ritualistic practices engender safety and predictability in the learning experiences that Mister Rogers’ facilitates for his viewers. I also suggest that Mister Rogers’ nonverbal communication attends to his viewers by making them feel a part of these learning experiences. He constructs a story in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, in which the student and adult characters work together as co-learners, to affirm the value of this democratic and humanizing pedagogy. I end this chapter by observing that Mister Rogers, in Freirean (1993/1970) fashion, encodes in many of the elements of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) the message that learning takes place optimally when students can recognize their own creativity and the creativity of others in a democratic learning praxis of mutual humanization.

5.1 MAKING A SPACE THAT BELONGS BOTH TO MISTER ROGERS AND THE VIEWERS CREATES A SAFE AND PREDICTABLE LEARNING SANCTUARY

First and foremost, a child is meant to feel “at home” in Mister Rogers’ house. “What we attempt to do on *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,” explains Rogers (1996), “is create a comfortable starting place to begin talking” (p.13). At the opening of every episode, the camera pans a model of Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood as if following the host’s movement from his place of work to the front door of his television house. The colors of the neighborhood houses in the opening model are invitingly bright and varied—shades of red, yellow, green, and orange. Costa’s musical introduction to “It’s a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” a jazzy crescendo of

rolling notes played on a keyboard synthesizer, evokes anticipation for Mister Rogers' arrival and the beginning of a half-hour's visit together.

The first camera shot inside the house, after the model of the neighborhood is panned, is from the viewer's perspective. The camera places the viewer as if he or she is sitting and waiting for Mister Rogers to arrive. Focused on the stop light, a gift from the local police department that the production staff "thought...might be interesting to keep in the living room of (the) television house" (Rogers, 1996, p.39), and which blinks yellow to signal Mister Rogers' arrival, the camera zooms out and pans left across the room, as though the viewer is rising and crossing to meet Mister Rogers at the door.

As the camera pans to the door, other familiar pieces of Mister Rogers' house come into view—the fish tank and plant that suggest the need to "take care of other living things" (Rogers, 1996, p.40), the Trolley track that serves as the go-between of reality and pretend (Sharapan, 2002), the closet where Mister Rogers hangs his sport coat and retrieves his cardigan, and Picture Picture, which becomes for each episode a different painting that is often related to the overarching theme of the entire story.

In "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), all of the paintings shown are impressionistic, and each painting encodes values of the learning sanctuary that Rogers has prepared. For the first episode, Picture Picture depicts a mother and father sitting beside a child that is eating in its high chair. Encoded in this image is the caring that the mother and father have for their child. This was an important value of the *Neighborhood*, Sharapan (2002) explains, because "children look to their parents as trusted organizers of their world" (p.32).

For the second episode, the image of Picture Picture is of three girls seemingly playing "Ring around the Rosie." Either sisters or friends, the three girls at play encode the joy that can

be associated with learning through the imagination. Fantasy is such an important part of their learning, observes Sharapan (2002), because “the concept of pretend (is) something distinct from reality and yet clearly valued for what it offers children in the way of their own coping” (p.32).

In the third episode, which is the one that includes the learning about how construction paper and a paper chain are made, *Picture Picture* presents the image of abstract shapes of different colors and sizes that resemble pencils and strips of paper. This image seems to contribute to the encoding of partnership, patience, hard work, and discovery as values of learning; these values are evident in the processes of how to make a paper chain, as Mister Rogers demonstrates, and of how to plan a field trip, as the puppet students demonstrate in the *Neighborhood of Make-Believe*. The symbolic qualities of the paper chain that Mister Rogers makes are notable. Different colored strips of paper linked together to form an aesthetically pleasing result represents in Freirean (1993/1970) language the partnership that should exist between people as co-learners. Like the students and adults in *Make-Believe*, who demonstrate the praxis of mutual humanization, the efforts of all learners “must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power,” according to Freire (p.56). This profound trust is encoded into the dialogue between the adult and student characters in *Make-Believe*. To interpret their world children seek help from adults, and vice versa, according to Sharapan (2002).

This aspect of the adult-child relationship also speaks to an interpretation of the painting depicted on *Picture Picture* in episode four. In this program, *Picture Picture* shows a mother reading alone in a chair. Episode four also includes Lady Aberlin’s discovery of the wind source in *Make-Believe*. *Picture Picture*’s image of an adult engaged in a book and Lady Aberlin’s research discovery further suggest that the values of patience and hard work in the processes of

learning apply to adults as well as children. As Freire (1998) suggests, that teaching is inseparable from learning makes teaching a joyful experience. When teachers lose the feeling of joy in learning, observes Freire, they also corrode their openness and caring for their students.

The painting of an old-fashioned classroom shown by Picture Picture in the final episode couples with Daniel Tiger's revelation that school learning can occur in many ways, both contribute to Rogers' encoded value that students, or anyone for that matter, should be encouraged to care about their learning because they feel included in it. The classroom, Picture Picture implies, is a place that belongs to the students and their teacher, which is the kind of learning space that Mister Rogers establishes in his television house as well.

For example, Mister Rogers demonstrates that even the simplest tasks matter to children; therefore, as Freire (1993/1970) advocates, Mister Rogers "partners" (p.56) with his visitors in doing the familiar things around the house like feeding the fish, answering the door or telephone, or beckoning the Trolley for the transition into Make-Believe. He leads into many of these routines with the suggestion "*Let's...*" For example, when it is time to feed the fish, he says, "*Let's* feed the fish." When it is time to call for the Trolley, he says, "*Let's* have some imagining—some make-believe." In the episode in which he visits Eric Kloss, the jazz musician first telephones Mister Rogers to invite him and his television friends to the neighborhood library, and when the phone rings Mister Rogers says, "I wonder who's calling *us* on the phone." When Ella Jenkins is at the door, he says, "Come on in and teach *us* something."

Rogers (1996), even in his "letter visits" with viewers, encodes the value of making children feel a part of the learning space. He values all of their natural curiosities about the television house and responds in ways that are meant to make them feel special for asking their questions. For example, three-year-old Jason worries, "Why aren't there any locks on your

door?” To address Jason’s caring question Rogers explains that his television house is not his real house, and that “in my real home...we do have locks and keys for the door.” Seeming to sense Jason’s concern for safety in his own home, Rogers adds that locks and keys “often help people feel safe” (p.34).

Four-year-old Rafi wonders, “Where is your computer?” Explaining that he is most comfortable writing his scripts in pen on a “yellow notepad,” Rogers expresses to Rafi that he is interested in the ways people use computers at home or at work, “especially when they help people communicate in caring ways with each other, like you did in your letter to me” (p.37).

Perhaps the letter that best represents how Rogers’ (1996) facilitated communication with children in caring ways arrived from the father of Isaac, who was three-and-a-half. Rogers describes the letter as one of “our” favorites because it came from “a very sensitive and loving father” who in conversation with his son had realized that Isaac was “struggling with the question about how real I was” (p.6). The letter and response are indicative of the kind of mutual trust Rogers fostered in the safe and caring learning space of the *Neighborhood*. The entire text is worth including.

Isaac’s father wrote:

Dear Mister Rogers,

While putting [my son] to bed last night, he said, “Mr. Rogers doesn’t poop [i.e. defecate].” I said of course you did. He denied it vehemently. I asked where his certainty came from and he said, “Well, I’ve never seen him poop.” I pointed out that there were lots of people he hadn’t seen poop, and they all still did. He accepted that about others [adults and kids], but denied it about you. I kissed him goodnight and left the room. Five minutes later I was summoned to his bedside.

“Daddy, I know Mr. Rogers doesn’t poop.” “How?” I asked. “Because I’ve seen his house, and he just has a closet, a living room, a kitchen, and a yard.”

Rogers replied to Isaac:

Your father told me you had an interesting talk with him about whether I “poop.”

It’s good that you and he were talking about that. I know it can be hard to understand that I do. I am a real person. And, one thing for certain is that all real people “poop.”

That is an important part of how our bodies work. Little by little as you grow, you will learn more about how our bodies work. And it is good that you are thinking about that now. On some of our programs I show the bathroom in my television house. It is off to the side of the kitchen. We often don’t show the bathroom of our television set because that is not my real house. I think of it as my “television house.” That is a place where I stop by during my workday to have a television visit with my friends. When I am at work, I use the bathrooms in the building where we make our programs.

To Isaac’s father Rogers wrote:

Your letter was absolutely refreshing! Thank you for all that you shared with us, especially for the conversation you had with Isaac about my bodily functions. That’s such a wonderful story to attest to young children’s focus on “bathroom” concerns. But what particularly struck me was the way you were so sensitive to your son’s questions and that you were willing to help him think the issues through, even with a subject that can be as sensitive as that. Your son is indeed fortunate to have a father like you. (pp.7-9)

This letter visit seems to epitomize the Freirean (1993/1970) notions of authentic education through true dialogue. Although Isaac's concern was sensitive, both his father and Mister Rogers were willing to "talk" about it with Isaac. According to Friere, "dialogue can not occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (p.69). Believing that everyone has the right to speak their word is a courageous commitment of love that is essential for true dialogue to take place between people, Freire believes. He adds that what follows from this kind of commitment are relationships of mutual trust.

5.2 ATTENDING TO THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE VIEWERS CULTIVATES MUTUAL TRUST

Many children have written letters to Mister Rogers asking him what he does at work. Their questions affirm *Neighborhood's* objective of making each show a "television visit" (Rogers, 1996; Sharapan, 2002). In other words, Mister Rogers did not spend a half-hour each weekday visiting with children on television because it was his job. Rogers explains in letters to children who are curious about his job that he dedicates a lot of time at work planning each program and thinking of ideas for future visits. He explains to the children that he takes part in many meetings "so that everything will be ready for *us* when we go into the studio" (Rogers, 1996, p.23).

By regarding the time he spends with his viewers as a visit and not a job, and working hard to make the learning space of the *Neighborhood* ready for every visitor, Rogers manifests

ways in which he has attended to his viewers and their feelings as learners and as human beings. The show's formula seems simple yet profound: In Freirean (1993/1970) fashion, Rogers shows a caring for his viewers by what he does to prepare for each visit; the letters his viewers have written seem to demonstrate their feelings of belongingness in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*; Rogers' responses to these letters manifest his faith that his viewers come to the *Neighborhood* as television friends who are open to learning; therefore, in that space he and his television friends can develop mutual trust for one another. This feeling of trust is palpable when he enters the space at the beginning of each visit.

Rogers (1996) thought of himself as a "television friend" who "cares about children and families" (pp.28-29). He did not consider himself a famous actor; neither did he think of himself as a father-figure. Yet, Mister Rogers' entry into the house at the beginning of each episode resembles a father-figure coming home from work to spend time with his children.

Mister Rogers always springs through the door with a smile on his face, his eyes looking directly into the camera. He does not carry a briefcase; however, the daily object he brings from work to share with his television friends and the enthusiastic way he enters the house suggest that he can not wait for the visit to begin so he can discuss the item of interest with them. The sharing of these objects is more than a show and tell routine. Rogers selects these objects carefully so that each child viewer, in Deweyan (1938) language, "gets out of his present experience all that there is in it for him at the time in which he has it" (p.49). As Mister Rogers says:

It gives me a good feeling to be able to share good things with you.

Children learn a lot from adults, and adults learn a lot from children.

I'm very glad to know children in my life. (Episode 1)

To engender the good feeling that comes from sharing Mister Rogers shows his viewers a legal pad and a book that demonstrates how to make Greek letters. He takes a pen from his pocket and says:

I've just come from the Neighborhood School. I'm trying to learn the Greek language, and I have a really splendid teacher. Here, I'll show you how the word for "love" looks in Greek. Now that word is "agape," and it's one way to say love in Greek. In fact, there are so many ways of saying and expressing love in this world. (Episode 1)

According to Freire (1993/1970), a loving dialogue produces a climate of trust. Trust and comfort are also deeply encoded in Mister Rogers' ritual of changing from his sport coat and loafers to his cardigan and sneakers as a way of preparing for every television visit. Rogers explains the reason for this routine change of clothing:

Because I'm coming from my office, I'm wearing a jacket and shoes that I'd wear at work. But I think of our visits as a relaxing time with the children who are watching, and changing to a sweater and sneakers helps set that comfortable atmosphere. (Rogers, 1996, pp.34-35)

When he changes his shoes, he always tosses the first one he takes off playfully from one hand to the other. He also routinely zips his cardigan all the way up and then three-quarters of the way down, a practice that once elicited a letter from John, a three-year-old viewer. John (with a little help from his mother) asked Mister Rogers, "Do you zip your coat all the way up when you go outside to play in the snow? Or do you leave the zipper down a little like you do on your sweater?" (Rogers, 1996, p.35)

In his answer Rogers first explains that he zips his cardigan part way down so it does not block the microphone clipped to his tie; in his response he also assures John that he zips his coat up all the way when the weather is cold and snowy. Based on an action he has seen Mister Rogers do regularly in the television house, John problem poses. John is curious, and in Freirean (1998) fashion Rogers does not suffocate the boy's natural curiosity; rather he recognizes the educable opportunity in his and John's communication because both he and John, to use Freire's words, are "seekers" (p.58). Rogers explains a little of how television audio works in order to address John's curiosity about zipping the cardigan part way. John further shows his trust in Mister Rogers by expressing the desire to be just like him, and Rogers, in turn, facilitates for John the opportunity to understand the distinction between the practicalities of zipping a jacket to three-quarters inside a climate controlled studio versus doing the same in the cold and snowy outdoors. As Rogers (1996) says, "I've come to treasure the mail so much" because it "is a way people have of saying...here's something I'd like to tell you that matters to me" (p.xi). As Freire (1993/1970) advocates, Mister Rogers engages in an authentic dialogic with John; he attends to John's feelings and concerns in a humanizing and respectful way.

Rogers' nonverbal communication is as meaningful as his written or verbal in the way it attends to the caring relationship he forms with his viewers. For example, Mister Rogers often smiles directly at the camera. His smile is especially noteworthy when he is talking with Mr. McFeely in the first episode. When Mr. McFeely delivers a box of whistles to the house, Mister Rogers tells him that he has not ordered any whistles.

"You didn't?" Mr. McFeely says as he looks at the print out from the new computer system that he is trying to learn.

While Mr. McFeely scrutinizes the print out with a confused look on his face, Mister Rogers flashes a kind smile at the camera as if to share in the experience of this confusion with his television friends. (Mr. McFeely, who is very particular about his job, rarely makes mistakes.)

The bonding with Mister Rogers' television friends continues as Mr. McFeely thinks out loud about the error. Mr. McFeely says, "They're working on a new computer system at our place, and I'm trying to learn how it works. Now here it says Whistle Collection to R 144. I thought you were R 144."

Mister Rogers smiles again at the camera as he gently tells Mr. McFeely that he has no idea what number he is since he has no experience with the new computer system that Mr. McFeely is trying to decipher. Mister Rogers encodes in this particular smile the mutual understanding and trust that two familiar "friends," he and his viewers, can have when they spend a lot of time together. The smile constructs a fun, empathetic moment between them over Mr. McFeely's temporarily flustered state, and a shared happiness for Mr. McFeely after he discovers that Mister Rogers's number is R 143, not 144. Other times that Mister Rogers smiles at the camera, like when he enters the house, leaves the house, reflects with his viewers on ideas, or sings, he encodes in his smile warmth, safety, trust, and love as important values of the learning culture that is constructed in his sanctuary of the *Neighborhood*.

Other kinds of nonverbal communication add to the code that Mister Rogers' television house is a space of mutual humanization between him and his viewers. Often when he talks or sings directly into the camera, he gently tilts his head to the side, a gesture that seems to communicate sincerity and understanding. When he leaves the house to visit Eric Kloss at the neighborhood library, and when he leaves the library after the special visit, he makes a "Come

along with me” gesture to the camera as he walks out the door. Encoded in this simple gesture is the belongingness that he wants his viewers to feel during their time together. This simple gesture is intended to make viewers feel a part of the experience of visiting Eric Kloss; it affirms the relationship of learning new things together. Mister Rogers rarely talks with his hands as he builds this relationship with his viewers; he usually keeps his hands at his side when he speaks directly into the camera. Instead, the camera often captures Mister Rogers in close-ups “talking with, rather than to the viewers” (Family Communication, Incorporated, 2007). His facial expressions affirm the care he brings to each episode. Mister Rogers’ nonverbal communication supports Freire’s (1993/1970) notion that “love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p.70).

5.3 FACILITATING DEMOCRATIC LEARNING FOSTERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECOGNIZING CREATIVITY IN SELF AND OTHERS

Mister Rogers’ television house is a sanctuary where he and his “neighbors,” together, are what Freire would describe as “adventurer(s) in the art of learning” (p.105). In the first episode of his five-part story on the theme of learning, Mister Rogers creates an opportunity to assure his television friends that “no one person can do everything.” While feeding the fish he reflects on what the fish can and can not do. He says:

Fish can do things people can’t do, and people can do things fish can’t do.

Nobody does everything. People can’t stay under water all the time. Fish can’t say words the way we do—or whistle.

Acknowledging that he has never learned how to whistle, Mister Rogers models for his viewers what Freire (1993/1970) refers to as “faith in (his) vocation to be more fully human” (p.71). According to Freire, acknowledging one’s own limitations is an essential component of the development of mutual trust with others.

Mister Rogers acknowledges one of his limitations when he shares with his viewers that he can not whistle, but that he *can* do other things apart from whistling. He says:

Did you ever know anybody who could whistle with just his or her mouth?

That’s something I’ve tried and tried to do, but I just never learned very well.

But that’s all right. There are other things I can do. (Episode 1)

Aware that his viewers’ might have anxieties about what they can *not* do, and that these anxieties might affect the way they care for or feel cared for by others, Mister Rogers attends to his viewers’ feelings in song. In part of the lyric of “Many Ways to Say I Love You,” Mister Rogers affirms that there are simple and creative ways to care for others.

Cleaning up a room can say I love you.

Hanging up before you’re asked to.

Drawing special pictures for the holidays and making plays.

You’ll find many ways to say I love you. (Episode 1)

In this lyric Rogers encodes the value of developing a stronger sense of self by finding ways to care for others. This is consistent with Noddings’ (1998) contention that “children need to participate in caring with adult models who show them how to care, talk with them about the difficulties and rewards of such work, and demonstrate in their own work that caring is important” (p.191). The beginning of the story that occurs in *The Neighborhood of Make-Believe* reinforces Rogers’ encoded value of caring.

When the Make-Believe story unfolds in the first episode of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), Robert Troll is in the process of taking a Neighborhood of Make-Believe census. On King Friday’s order, everyone, including Trolley, must be registered. Troll has a problem; Trolley can not sign his name and no census counts unless the name can be signed, according to the King. Lady Aberlin figures out that Trolley can sign its census form by what it can do, which is sign the form with its wheel marks. She cares about the Trolley’s feelings of being included in the neighborhood census. On Lady Aberlin’s suggestion Trolley runs its wheels backward and forward over the paper to make a signature mark. Although the Trolley does not possess the resources needed to sign its name to a census form, which is a limitation, Trolley does possess the creativity to make a signature mark on the form. Lady Aberlin helps the Trolley to discover this creativity in order to complete the census; Robert Troll demonstrates that the way to discover the Trolley’s creative potential is to be willing to consider the problem democratically with Lady Aberlin. Not only can Freire’s (1993/1970) point that democratic learning realizes creative potential be observed here, but Robert Troll’s willingness to engage in democratic dialogue with a woman, Lady Aberlin, can also be admired for its encoded message to children that men and women should care about one another as learners and have faith in each others’ abilities to solve problems as co-investigators.

Adding to this code, Lady Aberlin, like Robert Troll, confronts a learning conflict of her own. She works with a wind machine that has been registering strong gusts, but she can not figure out the source of these gusts. Although she really wants to find the source, she shows a willingness to be patient with her research. Furthermore, she makes a game out of the research by dancing (a talent for which Lady Aberlin is noted) with the machine to various parts of the

neighborhood, all the time watching the machine closely to see when and where in the neighborhood it registers the strong gusts. She pauses periodically to record her data.

Lady Aberlin demonstrates a love for the learning in which she is engaged, as well as a faith and a trust in the learning process that she will be able to overcome the conflict of resolving the source of the wind gusts if she remains patient with and committed to the task. Rogers uses Lady Aberlin's approach as a way of encoding one of *Neighborhood's* key values—that problems are rarely solved in a half-hour (Sharapan, 2002). In Deweyan (1938) language, Lady Aberlin makes her experience educative by allowing patience and resolve to become habits of her learning process; the game she makes out of the research is a kind of collateral learning that evolves from her engaged enjoyment of the experience; and her dedication to find the strong wind source manifests a social responsibility to King Friday, who assigned her the task, and to the other residents of the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, who also have an interest in her research.

A character that is always sensitive to the feelings of the puppets of Make-Believe, Lady Aberlin is also willing to help Robert Troll conduct the Neighborhood census. X the Owl, one of the puppet residents that provide census information to Lady Aberlin, also entrusts Lady Aberlin with the confidence that he can not whistle. After a series of questions that X answers proudly, Lady Aberlin asks X, "Do you know how to whistle?"

X responds sheepishly, "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that."

"Can't you whistle, X?" Lady Aberlin responds empathetically.

"No, but I can fly. Does that count?" X asks hopefully.

"I'm sure it does," assures Lady Aberlin. "Some can whistle, some can fly, some can sing, some can sigh."

“Meow meow meow sing,” chimes Henrietta Pussycat, X’s tree house neighbor, to which X replies, “And you sing real pretty, Henrietta.”

“Meow thanks,” gushes Henrietta.

In a climate of mutual trust facilitated by Lady Aberlin, X the Owl has faith that his inability to whistle does not “displace” him, to employ Freire’s (1903 1970) term (p.71). Lady Aberlin also attends to X the Owl’s feelings in the same way that Mister Rogers attends to the feelings of his viewers. As she has with the Trolley and its ability to make a signature mark on its census form, Lady Aberlin recognizes X’s creativity by telling him that flying counts as valuable census information. X the Owl, in a Freirean act of extending the faith in himself and others that he has developed in his humanizing dialogue with Lady Aberlin, spreads the “faith in humankind” of which Freire writes by complimenting his neighbor Henrietta Pussycat on her singing. This exchange exemplifies Freire’s (1993/1970) suggestion that communication is authentic when “love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p.70).

The loving dialogic shared among X, Henrietta, and Lady Aberlin segues into what Dewey (1938) refers to as an “experiential continuum” (p.33) for the viewer after the setting shifts from The Neighborhood of Make-Believe back to the inside of Mister Rogers’ television house. Suggesting ways that his television friends can continue to reflect on themselves as learners based on what they have experienced during the day’s visit with him, Mister Rogers says:

Some can do some things. Some can do others. X the Owl couldn’t whistle, but he could fly. I can’t whistle, but I can clean up a room. What are some of the things that you can do? Do you ever think of all the many things you’ve learned to do since you were a baby? Whenever you see or hear a tiny baby, do you ever

think: I was like that baby at one time, and now I'm not a baby any more. I'm really growing a lot. (Episode 1)

He sings "You're Growing" and then continues, "And there are people who are really proud of the way you're growing and learning about yourself and your world." In this statement Mister Rogers encodes the importance of developing self-worth and self-dignity through learning and growing. As Dewey (1938) contends, learners grow in educative experiences. The active nature of growing, Dewey adds, makes it an important part of the learner's experiential continuum. Educative experiences, according to Dewey, arouse the curiosity of learners and strengthen their desires and initiatives to keep learning.

In Deweyan fashion, Rogers facilitates opportunities for his viewers to grow through the experiences in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992). For example, when Mister Rogers shows the viewers the piece of vacuum hose that one of his neighbors was going to put in the trash, and tells the viewers that he has "some ideas" for it, he is, to use Dewey's (1938) words "using his greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience" (p.38). He is suggesting that seemingly useless objects can have value if not taken for granted. He stirs the imaginations of his young viewers by sitting on the living room rug, as they might in their own houses, and rolling toy cars through the vacuum hose as if it is a tunnel. In Deweyan (1938) terms, Mister Rogers both engages viewers in his creative way to explore uses for the vacuum hose as he encodes the value of not taking even the simplest things for granted. In this case, he encodes that a seemingly useless object, a piece of vacuum hose, may be something from which his viewers can learn.

He extends this encoded value by pretending that the vacuum hose is an elephant's trunk. Saying that he and his grandson like to pretend that they are elephants who "go around saying,

‘Oh me, oh my,’” (Episode 3) like H.J. Elephant does in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, Mister Rogers implies that he and his grandson have appreciated each other’s creative use of a seemingly useless object, a discovery that they have made together. As Noddings (1998) contends, “Coexploration can lead to mutual transformation” (p.193). Rogers implies that he and his grandson have learned to discover value in an object that someone else regarded as a piece of trash. The message here is that nothing, and no one, is useless if time and caring are directed toward that object or person.

As Noddings (1998) advises, “If we want to produce people who will care for one another, then it makes sense to give students practice in caring and reflecting on that practice” (p.191). This is precisely what Mister Rogers does. He tells the viewers that if they do not have a tube or a towel to use for pretending to be elephants, then they could do what he and his grandson sometimes do when they imagine themselves to be elephants; they swing their arms in front of them while saying “Oh me, oh my.” In addition to encoding the value of not taking little things for granted, Rogers has claimed that this kind of pretend facilitates for children ways to grow “in problem-solving, fun, and imagination” (Sharapan, 2002). In other words, Mister Rogers pretends in order to guide his viewers’ growth toward recognition of the creative potential in all things, living and nonliving.

Not taking children and their creative potential for granted is a value that is affirmed in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe storyline of the three students, Prince Tuesday, Ana Platypus, and Daniel Tiger, who plan their own field trip. The first example of an adult character not taking the Make-Believe students for granted occurs after Lady Aberlin leaves X the Owl and Henrietta upon completing their census information. Continuing her research with the wind machine, she notices that a strong gust registers close to Daniel’s clock. This investigation leads

her to a note posted on the clock that reads, “I’m at school planning a field trip. See you later. Love, Daniel S. Tiger.” In the next episode Daniel has posted another note that reads, “Dear anyone, we’re still working on our field trip. I’ll tell you about it next time. Ugga Mugga. Daniel Tiger.” After reading both notes, Lady Aberlin is delighted for Daniel and the other students for the opportunity they have to plan their own field trip and for the hard work they are putting into the arrangements.

Daniel’s notes are consistent with the Freirean notion that creative potential grows in a culture of mutual humanization and democratic learning, especially in the presence of love and trust. “Ugga Mugga” is Daniel’s expression for rubbing noses with someone as a way of communicating his love for that person. Mostly, it is a special bond that Daniel and Lady Aberlin share, but when Robert Troll, who is with Lady Aberlin when she discovers Daniel’s second note, inquires as to the meaning of “Ugga Mugga,” Lady Aberlin sees an opportunity not only to demonstrate the nose rub but also to show Robert Troll that she cares about him as well. After they rub noses, Troll asks, “That’s a Ugga Mugga?”

“Yes,” replies Lady Aberlin. “...just another way of showing you love somebody,” to which Troll adds, “There are so many ways, aren’t there?”

Lady Aberlin’s way of showing caring, in addition to demonstrating “Ugga Mugga” for Robert Troll and helping him take the census, is to show concern for the neighborhood students when a conflict arises that threatens to undermine their field trip plans and the development of their creative power. James Michael Jones has invented a learning machine that he alleges can be placed on one’s head and can provide all of the learning one needs. Lady Elaine Fairchild, to whom Jones’ demonstrates the learning machine, suggests that the children will not need to take

the field trip because the machine makes it pointless. Lady Aberlin becomes aware of Lady Elaine's suggestion and is worried that the students' feelings may be hurt.

The wise Mayor Maggie, however, is present when Lady Elaine suggests that the children no longer need to take their field trip. Employing a Deweyan (1938) approach to the conflict, Mayor Maggie draws on her wisdom to act in the interests of the students, but she does not exhibit personal power or any form of external control. Instead, she facilitates the students' opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not to cancel the field trip and learn solely from the learning machine. She tells Prince Tuesday, who supposes his father (King Friday) would want him "to vote for the head machine," that he is to vote for exactly what he would like. After Ana Platypus says she would rather take the field trip, Mayor Maggie asks Daniel for his vote.

"I vote for both," Daniel says. He continues, "Why can't we have a field trip, and teachers, and machines and everything. The more we can use for learning good stuff the better."

Mayor Maggie asks the group, "So how do you feel about Daniel's suggestion everybody?"

The students decide to take the field trip, and the mayor says, "It's settled then. We'll go on the field trip." The students also realize that they can learn from all the resources that are available to them, including the learning machine.

Mayor Maggie's faith and trust in the students to make their own decisions concerning the field trip, and her care for the feelings the students had invested in the planning of their own field trip are profound ways that Mister Rogers encodes the value of humanization through democratic problem solving. In Freirean (1993/1970) fashion, Rogers portrays in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe school that

true dialogue (that) cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical

thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation rather than as static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (p.73)

Freire's (1993/1970) contends that critical thinking is transformative. The transformative experience for the students in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe—their realization that they could make a decision about the field trip without being told what to do by adult characters—encodes the message that learning should be democratic, collaborative, creative, and transformative.

In “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), multiple perspectives on learning are meant to be rendered in a democratic atmosphere. The safety, feelings, trust, and creative potential of every viewer matters. Every viewer, every character, every visitor, and every Make-Believe puppet is respected as a being that is in the “process of becoming,” to employ a Freirean (1993/1970, p.65) term. In the Freirean manner of viewing learning as an ongoing activity, banked education is relegated in Mister Rogers' learning culture in favor of problem-posing through a humanizing praxis of democratic collaboration.

6.0 AN EDUCATIVE PEDAGOGY OF EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS AND “BECOMING” AWARENESS OF SELF AND OTHERS BASED ON PROBLEM- POSING RATHER THAN BANKED LEARNING

“Problem-posing education,” claims Freire (1993/1970), “affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (p.65). The awareness of being uncompleted, which Freire regards as an *exclusively* human manifestation, roots education in a transformational and ongoing reality. In Freirean fashion, Rogers facilitates for his viewers educative experiences that engender an emerging consciousness of self and others through the praxis of problem-posing learning.

In this chapter, I observe that problem-posing education in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) takes place mostly in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. The problem-posing that occurs in this place of pretend through the stories of the Make-Believe students and their field trip, Lady Aberlin and her wind machine, and H.J. Elephant and his Boomerang Toomerang Soomerang, I observe, is consistent with Sharapan’s (2002) description of Make-Believe as a place that helps children learn to cope and problem-solve imaginatively because they identify with the Make-Believe characters and situations that model coping and problem solving. I further discuss how James Michael Jones’ learning machine, which is introduced in the Make-Believe story, is a representation of the Freirean (1993/1970) concept of banked education. While the Make-Believe students show courtesy and respect for Jones’ invention,

they embrace the opportunity that Mayor Maggie facilitates for them to consider the problem of how *they* want to learn. I discuss the humanizing dialogue, collateral learning, and democratic solidarity that emerge after Mayor Maggie poses the problem to the students in a way that invites each of them to contribute a perspective.

The chapter proceeds to a discussion of how Mister Rogers, at the end of each episode's Neighborhood of Make-Believe segment, poses to his viewers the questions of what they think the Make-Believe characters will and should do with the problems they are considering. In a ritual of problem-posing for his viewers following the transition from pretend to reality, Mister Rogers both attends to his viewers' curiosities and opinions on the Make-Believe story as he strengthens the educative value of the Make-Believe experience by applying it to his viewers' lives. He also allows his viewers to consider "the concept of pretend as something distinct from reality," as Sharapan (2002, p.32) explains, by taking them to places in the *Neighborhood* in which his viewers can meet people that Mister Rogers refers to as special visitors. I discuss in the chapter the way Mister Rogers questions and dialogues with his special visitors to the *Neighborhood* because he is curious about their talents and interests. His curiosity, I suggest, attends to his viewers' curiosities. Furthermore, I observe in the chapter that through his communications with these visitors, Mister Rogers encodes the value of accepting that learning in a humanizing praxis occurs among people of different genders, races, and ethnicities.

I end this chapter with a discussion of how Mister Rogers also uses his song lyrics to ask questions of his viewers and to engage them in reflections about their own lives and the lives of others. I suggest that his song lyrics seem to pull together all of the encoded values of Rogers' praxis of mutual humanization within the educative learning culture he constructs.

6.1 PROBLEM-POSING EDUCATION OVER BANKED LEARNING FACILITATES EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF MAKE-BELIEVE

In “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), the praxis of problem-posing engenders an emerging consciousness in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe students. James Michael Jones’ machine offers banked learning to the students of the Make-Believe school. Jones promises the students that the learning machine will teach them everything they need to know. In Freirean terms, the machine will deposit learning into the children’s minds as if they were containers or receptacles. “Why there’s not any need for teachers or field trips or anything,” claims James Michael Jones. “You can learn it all from the machine,” adds Lady Elaine Fairchild (Episode 4). The conflict that Rogers introduces through James Michael Jones’ invention poses a problem for the Make-Believe students. To resolve the problem the students have to become conscious of why the field trip is important to them.

Mayor Maggie admits that the claims made by James Michael Jones and Lady Elaine Fairchild about the learning machine are “extraordinary;” however, engaging in the praxis of problem-posing and democratic learning, Mayor Maggie suggests, “Suppose we present this to the school children...We’ll let them decide whether to go on with the field trip” (Episode 4).

The students’ decision to go forward with the field trip, and Daniel Tiger’s suggestion that learning can occur with field trips, teachers, machines, “and everything” (Episode 5), follows the Freirean (1993/1970) notion that “the teacher’s thinking,” which is represented by the learning machine, “is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (p.58). Banked learning “anesthetizes” an emergence of consciousness, according to Freire (p.62). Without the democratic resolution facilitated by Mayor Maggie, the Make-Believe students’ consciousness about how and why learning is important to them may not have emerged at least

in time to preserve the field trip into which they have devoted a lot of time and creative planning. Prince Tuesday may have become a victim to prescribed thinking; he may have accepted the learning machine over the field trip knowing that his father King Friday would have preferred the learning machine. Daniel Tiger's consciousness may never have emerged to declare that "the more we can use for learning good stuff the better" (Episode 5), which seems to be one of the most profound thematic statements in all five of the episodes of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992).

Mayor Maggie's problem-posing, in Freirean (1993/1970) language, affirms the students of Make-Believe as "beings in the process of *becoming*" (p.65). Problem-posing, Freire claims, roots itself in the dynamic present. For Lady Aberlin, researching the source of the wind gusts occurring in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe is a dynamic process over the five episodes of the story. At first she investigates whether strong wind is present around X and Henrietta's tree, and then she realizes that "the wind is getting stronger" (Episode 1) by Daniel's clock. Later, when H.J. Elephant is learning how to operate Lady Elaine's Boomerang, Toomerang Soomerang, a strong gust registers near Lady Elaine's museum-go-round, and Lady Aberlin appears saying, "Oh, I thought I had found the wind source. It was really strong for a short time, but it's gone now" (Episode 2).

Another time, when H.J. Elephant is practicing by the castle, Lady Aberlin again rushes into the scene, saying, "What happened here? Just a minute ago I got a very strong reading on my wind machine. What were you doing?" (Episode 3) Ms. Paulificatte's revelation that H.J. Elephant had been practicing nearby narrows the aim of Lady Aberlin's problem-posing. She directs her investigation toward H.J. Elephant and his Boomerang practice. When she discovers that H.J.'s disappearance and reappearance are the sources of the wind gusts, she announces,

“That’s it. I’ve found the extra wind source. Thank you all very much. I must report my wind velocity data immediately” (Episode 3).

Problem-posing and not banked education facilitates for Lady Aberlin a learning process of emerging consciousness; she is active in her learning, and her creativity in solving her problem is exhibited rather than inhibited. Her learning experience is educative in Deweyan (1938) terms because she not only likes what she is doing but with each dynamic of her research she cultivates “the most important attitude that can be formed...the desire to go on learning” (p.48). Lady Aberlin’s experience is educative also because it involves the processes of observing, data recording, hypothesizing, questioning, testing her hypotheses, forming new hypotheses, and eventually solving the problem with the help of other Make-Believe residents. As Dewey explains:

An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at that time, constitutes (her) environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom (she) is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation. (p.44)

In Deweyan (1938) fashion, H.J. Elephant also undergoes an educative experience as he learns how to operate the magical boomerang given to him by Lady Elaine Fairchild. When H.J. Elephant holds what Lady Elaine calls her Boomerang Toomerang Soomerang as he recites the magic words Lady Elaine has taught him, he is able to disappear and reappear in some other part of the Neighborhood. As Lady Elaine has instructed, H.J. Elephant holds the Boomerang, shifts his weight from one foot to another, and chants, “Oh Me, Oh My, Boomerang, Toomerang, Soomerang” (Episode 2).

Other residents for whom H.J. Elephant demonstrates what he has learned are impressed by what H.J. can do with the Boomerang. Lady Aberlin is so engaged the first time she witnesses H.J.'s ability to disappear and reappear that she does not notice the strong gust that registers on her wind machine. The camera, however, focuses on the wind machine so viewers are given a clue as to what might be causing the wind gusts. In a subtle way this clue seems intended to intrigue the viewers and to attend to their curiosities about whether Lady Aberlin will eventually notice that the wind source might have something to do with H.J. Elephant's Boomerang trick. The subtle clue also seems intended to make the viewers feel important by knowing something about the problem of the wind gusts that Lady Aberlin has not yet discovered. Implicitly, Mister Rogers seems to foster a desire in the viewer to want to know more about the wind source and the way in which Lady Aberlin will discover it.

At the same time, Lady Elaine and Ms. Paulificatte' praises of H.J. Elephant's demonstration foster H.J.'s desire to keep practicing and learning. After H.J. performs his Boomerang trick for each of them, Lady Elaine responds, "Very good, H.J." (Episode 2) and Ms. Paulificatte says, "You do that *very* well" (Episode 3). In Freirean (1993/1970) terms, Lady Elaine and Ms. Paulificatte affirm H.J. as a learner in a humanizing praxis that Mister Rogers constructs; both of these adult Make-Believe characters demonstrate that positive reinforcement fosters the desire in the learner to keep on learning.

Harriet Cow, the Make-Believe school teacher, also gives H.J. Elephant positive reinforcement for the work he has done in learning the Boomerang trick. After H.J. Elephant shows Harriet Cow and her students his trick, Harriet Cow asks H.J. to demonstrate the Boomerang practice a second time, saying, "Oh, H.J., how did you do that? Could you show us once again?" (Episode 3). The problem that arises is that H.J. Elephant does not disappear the

second time. At first he does not realize that he forgets to say, “Oh Me, Oh My” before he says “Boomerang Toomerang Soomerang.” He says dejectedly, “I’m still here. It didn’t work. I didn’t learn it after all” (Episode 3). He eventually figures out the problem, but not before he has the opportunity to engage in an educative learning experience. Harriet Cow, the teacher, facilitates this educative experience by problem-posing, saying, “Now just a minute...You launched into that pretty quickly. Are you sure you did everything you’re supposed to do?” (Episode 3).

First, by having to think about the learning processes that he thinks he already has mastered, H.J. Elephant demonstrates in Deweyan terms good habit. Reflecting on the process of how to make the Boomerang work, H.J. says very deliberately, “First, I’m supposed to raise my leg and then say, ‘Oh, me, Oh, my’ and then say ‘Boomerang, Toomerang, Soomerang’” (Episode 3). Before Harriet Cow problem-poses, H.J. approaches his learning more as a “cause” than with a “reason,” to employ words Dewey (1938) uses to distinguish between good and bad habit (p.34). Up to the time that he forgets some of the words of the incantation, H.J. has been unconsciously repeating the phrase that Lady Elaine Fairchild had taught him when she gave him the Boomerang to practice. The way Lady Elaine has taught H.J. about the Boomerang Toomerang Soomerang follows the banking concept of education that Freire (1993/1970) rejects. The emerging consciousness of H.J.’s learning does not occur until he is posed with the problem of why his incantation does not work. This emerging consciousness then leads to a generative continuity of experience for H.J. Elephant; in future practices he is likely to remember the incantation process because he has taken ownership of his own learning.

H.J. Elephant’s experience becomes even more educative because of the collateral learning that takes place after H.J. disappears for a second time. A frightened Ana Platypus asks,

“Does he have to go away again? I like it when he comes back, but, well, it scares me when he goes away so quickly” (Episode 3)

As Dewey (1938) writes of collateral learning, the formation of likes and dislikes may be as important to the experience as the main idea of the lesson “for these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future.” Dewey continues:

If impetus in this direction is weakened instead of being intensified, something much more than mere lack of preparation takes place. The pupil is actually robbed of native capacities which otherwise would enable (her) to cope with the circumstances that (she) meets in the course of (her) life. (p.48)

In their democratic classroom, the Make-Believe students can express their “native capacities” freely. The fear that Ana Platypus expresses freely allows her to better cope with the experience of watching H.J. Elephant’s demonstration. Another example of a Make-Believe student’s opportunity to express fear freely is when Prince Tuesday also mentions his fear of Lady Elaine. When Lady Aberlin arrives at the school with a paper chain that Lady Elaine Fairchild has made and has asked Lady Aberlin to deliver, Prince Tuesday remarks of Lady Elaine, “I didn’t know (she) would really help us. Sometimes she scares people” (Episode 3).

Lady Aberlin’s response to Prince Tuesday’s fear is not as a prescriber of how he or the other students should think about Lady Elaine; this kind of response would be consistent with banked learning and inconsistent with both Lady Aberlin’s character and Mister Rogers’ humanizing praxis. Instead, Lady Aberlin replies, “But I don’t think (Lady Elaine) means to,” which gives H.J. Elephant the opportunity to add, “Just like I didn’t mean to scare Ana.” In H.J. Elephant’s statement, Lady Aberlin sees an opportunity to problem-pose by asking H.J., “How did that happen?” After H.J. explains the process he has followed to disappear and reappear

using the Boomerang, Lady Aberlin asks Ana, “Do you know why it scared you?” Ana responds, “I thought I was going to blow away” (Episode 3)

By using the words “blow away” to describe the reason for her fear, Ana creates a collateral learning opportunity for Lady Aberlin and the viewers. These words direct Lady Aberlin and the viewers, who are also invested in Lady Aberlin’s desire to find the source of the wind, to the answer she has been seeking. She grabs her wind machine and has H.J. repeat the incantation that causes him to disappear and reappear. The strong gust that ensues allows Lady Aberlin finally to resolve her wind research problem. Daniel Tiger, in a gesture of mutual humanization, offers to hold Ana Platypus’ hand when H.J. engages in his act. Ana says to Daniel after H.J. reappears, “Thanks for holding my hand, Daniel.” Daniel replies, “I was glad to.” Prince Tuesday then thanks Ana for holding his hand, to which Ana proclaims, “We were all together” (Episode 3).

In Ana Platypus’s simple but profound statement, Rogers encodes what Freire (1993/1970) describes as the solidarity—“We were all together”—that results from democratic learning and authentic dialogue in a praxis of mutual humanization. Mister Rogers includes his viewers in this solidarity by soliciting their opinions on how the conflicts should be addressed in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. He does this immediately after the transition from Make-Believe back to his television house. For example, at the end of Make-Believe in the second episode, Mister Rogers asks the viewers, “What do you think is making the wind? It seems that every time H.J. Elephant the Third said, ‘Oh, me, Oh, my’ or whistled there was more wind. Did you notice that? We’ll think more about that next time.” For the fourth episode’s transition from Make-Believe to the television house, Mister Rogers problem-poses again. He asks his viewers, “What do you think the children will decide? To put the learning machines on their heads, or to

go on the field trip? We'll think about that next time." And for the final episode his words epitomize his praxis. He says, "So they decided that they could use everything for learning: teachers, field trips, and machines. Of course, human beings learn best and most from other human beings. That's all part of being human, and we learn as we grow. Learning is part of growing."

In this closure statement from episode five, Mister Rogers encodes mutual humanization, democratic solidarity, and problem-posing as essential values of his educative learning culture; each value facilitates an expansive continuity of experience for every television friend that visits the *Neighborhood*. In this closure statement to the theme of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), I believe Mister Rogers apprehends the project of solidarity that is *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. His concept of "neighborhood" seems to suggest that every person, child or adult, is interconnected as both a teacher and a learner. Neighbors, young and old, should look out for another and be invested in one another. Mister Rogers' message is that we are responsible for one another as both people and learners. Not only is Mister Rogers providing the resources for children to grow into an awareness that all of the decisions they make impact others; he is also providing them opportunities to discover that their learning and growing will become more unified if they extend his praxis to their interactions with others. He is facilitating for adults opportunities to continue conversations with children that have been started in the *Neighborhood* in order to affirm that a people's solidarity emerges in the extension of this praxis. Rogers' project is to construct a culture in which people feel as though they *need* other people in order to learn and grow in a unified world. Rogers' praxis tries to make the world a *Neighborhood*.

6.2 DIALOGUING WITH SPECIAL VISITORS TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD FACILITATES EDUCATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR VIEWERS

In “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), special visitors to the *Neighborhood* also take part in the educative experience that Mister Rogers facilitates. Mister Rogers invites these visitors to share their talents and interests because he attends to his viewers’ curiosities while he engages in the satisfaction of his own. Furthermore, Mister Rogers seems to ask his visitors questions that his television friends might ask, and sometimes he visits these special neighbors in places that his television friends might like to see (Sharapan, 2002). (For example, Sharapan explains, in another episode of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* that is not under study, a trip to Universal Studios introduced viewers to Bill Bixby, the actor in the television show *The Incredible Hulk* that turned into a large green monster played by another actor, Lou Ferrigno, whom the viewers also met during the visit. The trip to Universal Studios delineated the two actors from their roles, and from their real-life identities, so the viewers could appreciate them as two different characters and two different people.) These special visits in the *Neighborhood* are educative for his viewers from a Deweyan (1938) perspective, for Dewey claims that

a primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by envioning conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile. (p.40)

Rogers seems to anticipate the kinds of concerns that children might bring to the experience of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992). For example, children might feel

inadequate because they can not learn to whistle when perhaps their friends can; they may have limited experiences with people of color; they may never have been exposed to the ways of different cultures; they may not understand why some people have disabilities and how these people cope with their disabilities. Seeming to anticipate what viewers might want or need to know more about when they visit the *Neighborhood*, Mister Rogers facilitates experiences that start a conversation he hopes that children might continue with their parents.

For example in the first episode, Mister Rogers visits with Eileen McNamara, a professional whistler. One of the talents McNamara demonstrates is bird whistling. With McNamara, Mister Rogers curiously asks how she has learned to imitate bird whistles. McNamara's response is that she repeats the processes of listening carefully to the birds and then imitating their whistles. The value of practice in learning is encoded in McNamara's response to Mister Rogers' question. McNamara also whistles a song for Mister Rogers, for which he compliments her skill. The display of her talent, however, also sets up an opportunity for Mister Rogers to share with his viewers that he has never been able to learn how to whistle. He models that just because he can not whistle does not mean that he can not appreciate McNamara's talent and be curious about how she has developed it.

In episode two, the visit with Ella Jenkins, a folk singer and a woman of color who teaches Mister Rogers Hindi hand signals and songs played on kazoos, encodes the value of learning between two people of different ethnicity. Many viewers of *Neighborhood* may not have opportunities to interact with people of a different color or ethnicity than theirs. For children that would not be able to bring these experiences to the *Neighborhood*, Mister Rogers' interaction with Jenkins provides an educative model of accepting and respecting. Jenkins first shows Mister Rogers a hand signal that means "I respect you." She demonstrates it and then has

Mister Rogers demonstrate it back to her. The communication between Jenkins and Mister Rogers has encoded value from a Deweyan (1938) perspective. First, Mister Rogers is completely engaged in the present experience of learning the hand signal. The pace of the learning is slow enough so that children can also try the hand signal along with Mister Rogers; however, the profound collateral learning taking place in this experience may be even more educative. Mister Rogers and his television friends are learning how to signal “I respect you” in Hindi from a woman of color. Ella Jenkins compliments Mister Rogers on how well he learns the Hindi hand signals she has been teaching him. Following her praise, Mister Rogers sees the opportunities both to show gratitude for her compliment and to consider why he learns so well from Jenkins. He concludes that whatever he would learn from her he would like because he likes her so much. In a mutually humanizing experience he shares with Ella Jenkins, Rogers encodes the value of cultivating respect among diverse learners that are all part of the same neighborhood.

This code of respect is evident further in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) when the host visits with Eric Kloss, a musician who is sight-impaired. When Mister Rogers arrives at the neighborhood library where the visit with Kloss takes place, the musician is engrossed in the reading machine he is going to talk about with Mister Rogers and his viewers. The machine is reading a letter to Kloss. When Mister Rogers asks Kloss to explain how the reading machine works, through this inquiry and Kloss’ explanation, Rogers encodes the learning value that it is more important to focus on what people can do rather than what they can not do. Kloss models that the value of people is not judged by their limitations but by the creative ways that they learn to deal with their limitations. In his interaction with Kloss, Mister Rogers provides another model for learning to accept.

To reinforce this code Mister Rogers has the machine “read” a poem entitled “Be the Best at Whatever You Are” by Douglas Malloch (1877-1938). The words of the poem are:

If you can't be a pine on the top of a hill
Be a scrub in the valley, but be the best little scrub on the side of the hill
Be a bush if you can't be a tree,
If you can't be a bush be a bit of the grass
And some highway happier make.
If you can't be a muskie, then just be a bass,
But the liveliest bass in the lake.
We can't all be captains, we've got to be crew,
There's something for all of us here.
There's big work to do and there's lesser work, too,
And the thing we must do is the near
If you can't be a highway, then just be a trail.
If you can't be the sun, be a star.
It isn't by size that you win or you fail.
Be the best of whatever you are. (Episode 4)

Deeply encoded in the words of this poem is what Sharapan (2002) describes as one of Rogers' “most caring and powerful messages...‘You are special—just because you're you’” (p.32). After their dialogue relating to the reading machine, Kloss demonstrates that he is an especially talented musician by playing skillfully an upbeat song accompanied by *Neighborhood's* musical director and accomplished jazz pianist John Costa. As they play, Costa seems to have on his face a look of sheer admiration for Kloss' talent and absorbed engagement

in their opportunity to perform together. They demonstrate the praxis of mutual humanization, to use Freire's (1993/1970) words, through their mutual abilities to communicate aesthetically through their music.

Deftness at aesthetic expression is also exhibited by Mister Rogers' visitor in the last episode of the theme on learning. Maggie Stewart, an African-American who also plays Mayor Maggie in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, assists Mr. McFeely in delivering a box of toys that Mister Rogers has requested. While helping Mister Rogers put batteries in the toys so he can show his viewers how toys, like people, need things on the inside to work on the outside, Stewart explains that she learned sign language without really knowing she was learning it. She explains that she learned by watching someone else sign, and she uses this story to quote an old Quaker saying, "Attitudes are caught, not taught," which is another powerful theme in the *Neighborhood* (also in Sharapan, 2002). Like the visit with Kloss in the previous episode, Stewart's visit affirms that learning challenges and miseducative experiences can be overcome with what Dewey (1938) refers to as "better...attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences" (p.37). As children learn to speak, Dewey suggests, new facilities and desires emerge in them. As children learn to read, claims Dewey, they broaden their environment. Applying Dewey to Maggie Stewart's and Eric Kloss' special visits, when children reflect upon those who can not speak because they can not hear, or those who can not read because they can not see, they become "more sensitive and responsive to certain conditions" (p.37). The quality of the present experience, adds Dewey, influences the way children approach future experiences.

Maggie Stewart adds to the quality of the experience of her visit by demonstrating at Mister Rogers' request the sign for the word "smile" as she sings "It's the Style to Wear a Smile." After the song, Mister Rogers signs a "smile" to Stewart. Impressed, Stewart asks

Mister Rogers, “How did you know that sign?” “I guess I saw you use it and it just became a part of me,” explains Mister Rogers.

In an educative praxis of mutual humanization and problem-posing, Mister Rogers encodes through his special visit with Maggie Stewart that attitudes are caught, not taught, or in Freirean (1993/1970) language, learning is more authentic in an experience of true dialogue rather than banked learning, even when the dialogue is in sign language. Mister Rogers seems to want his viewers to “catch” the attitude that the color or gender of his visitors does not change anything about the nature of his communication with them. As Handler-Spitz (2003) points out, Mister Rogers never uses *Neighborhood* as a platform for preaching on the values of equality and diversity. He simply makes these values part of his praxis.

6.3 ELICITING REFLECTION THROUGH SONG LYRIC IS PART OF THE PRAXIS OF MUTUAL HUMANIZATION

The praxis of mutual humanization is also evident in the song lyrics that Rogers wrote for *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Through lyrics that pose questions upon which the viewers are invited to reflect, Rogers attends to the feelings, fears, and anxieties that children are likely to bring to the *Neighborhood*. For example, in “Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things,” part of the lyric asks:

Has anybody said you're good lately?

Has anybody said you're nice?

And have you wondered how they could lately,

Wondered once or twice?

Did you forget that

Good people sometimes feel bad things? (Rogers, 1996, pp.20-21)

The lyric does not, to use Freire's (1993/1970) words, anesthetize a child's creative potential to figure out what good is by reflecting on what does not seem good. It does not deposit into a child's mind what "good" means or what "bad" means for that matter. It simply invites children to reflect on their behavior and consider that even when they think they do bad things, they are still good people. It also facilitates a positive continuity of this reflection if children apply the same consideration to others.

The same kind of reflection is encoded into the lyric "What Do You Do?" The first stanza of the song reads:

What do you do with the mad that you feel

When you feel so mad you could bite?

When the whole wide world seems oh so wrong,

And nothing you do seems very right?

What do you do? Do you punch a bag?

Do you pound some clay or some dough?

Do you round up friends for a game of tag?

Or see how fast you go? (Rogers, 1996, p.102)

Again, the lyric does not assert that anger is bad or wrong. Neither does the lyric bank into a child's mind one sure way of dealing with anger. Instead, it encourages reflection on what Freire (1993/1970) refers to as "*the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves*" (p.64). It makes the lyric an educative experience for children because in Deweyan (1938) language it acknowledges the "freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of

observation and of judgment exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile” (p.61). To an educator like Rogers, who constructs in the *Neighborhood* opportunities for his viewers to engage with him in the freedom of observation and judgment, the learning that results from reflecting upon how people deal with anger is intrinsically worthwhile.

Specifically in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), part of the lyric of “It’s the Style to Wear a Smile,” the song that Maggie Stewart sings in the last episode, suggests that it is equally worthwhile to consider what makes one happy. Mister Rogers asks his viewers through a line in the song, “Do you know how to put a smile on your face?” This lyrical question is not literally asking children to think about how a smile is physically formed on the face; rather, it encodes the value of reflecting on the things that make children happy so they might want to construct these kinds of experiences for themselves in the future.

Reflection is part of the praxis of Rogers’ lyrical questions; this is evident in another song he sings in the fourth episode of the story on learning. The song is titled, “I Wonder,” and it follows a reflection that Mister Rogers voices after telling the viewers that they are going to be visiting with Eric Kloss at the neighborhood library. Mister Rogers says:

One of the reasons we’re going to visit him today is that he has just learned to use a special reading machine which is over at the Neighborhood library, and he thought we might like to find out about it. You know me. I’m interested in all sorts of things, and I spend a lot of time trying to learn about things. I’m curious, and I wonder about all sorts of things like: I wonder who made this. (He holds up the box he has brought with him that held the batteries.) I wonder what this could be if it wasn’t a window? I wonder how long it took for somebody to write this book. I wonder how many stop and go lights there are in the world? I wonder if fish laugh or cry.

All of his wondering has to do with familiar things around the television house. His reflection encodes the value of thinking about even the simplest of things and of not taking anything for granted. His song lyric encodes the value of wondering as an important part of the praxis of reflection. He sings:

Did you know? Did you know?

Did you know that it's alright to wonder?

Did you know that it's alright to wonder?

There are all kinds of wonderful things.

Did you know? Did you know?

Did you know that it's alright to marvel?

Did you know that it's alright to marvel?

There are all kinds of marvelous things.

You can ask a lot of questions about the world

And your place in it.

You can ask about people's feelings; you can learn the sky's the limit.

Did you know? Did you know?

Did you know when you wonder you're learning?

Did you know when you marvel you're learning?

About all kinds of marvelous, marvelously wonderful things.

Perhaps no other part of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) attests more so to the educative value of reflection than the lyric from the song "I Wonder." Without prescribing "wonder" and "marvel" as necessary tenets of learning, the lyrics suggest that learning becomes

wonderful and marvelous when viewers have the opportunity to reflect on what they are learning educatively in a praxis of mutual humanization.

The concept of wonder epitomizes the relationship that Rogers' pedagogical framework has with Dewey's (1938, 1944/1916) theory of educative experience and Freire's (1993/1970, 1998) theory of education as a humanizing praxis. By asking his viewers questions and facilitating their opportunities to reflect on their learning, Mister Rogers provides a framework in which children can expand what they have learned in the *Neighborhood* to other experiences they encounter throughout their lives. By preparing for his viewers a learning space that is safe and trusting, and by providing experiences that attend to their feelings and anxieties, Rogers constructs a caring relationship with his viewers and models for them how to care about others. He affirms the value of caring in Make-Believe, a place of pretend where viewers can experience ways of coping and problem-solving in democratic and humanizing collaborations. In both reality and pretend, a problem-posing framework in which love, faith, mutual trust, and solidarity emerge in the praxis is preferred to banked learning. Neither Mister Rogers nor his characters in the *Neighborhood* preach to viewers. Creativity is exhibited and affirmed, not inhibited or assessed in both the television house of Mister Rogers and the Neighborhood of Make Believe. In both settings a learner's consciousness is given the resources to emerge, and all of the experiences are presented at a slow pace to facilitate this emerging consciousness.

In this next chapter, I suggest that in a praxis of emerging consciousness, virtues and virtuous practices become part of the learning culture. As Sharapan (2002) explains, the experiences of *Neighborhood* are meant to extend into the conversations that children have with their parents and other adults. Mister Rogers provides children a framework for interacting with one another, not just as children but as children who are growing into young adults. Many

people think of Mister Rogers as the Pied Piper of children, according to Bishop (2003). Many people oversentimentalize *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, according to Zelevansky (2004). In either case, the possibility that Mister Rogers' pedagogy has the potential to be transformative may be overlooked or underappreciated.

In chapter seven, I observe the values of silence, listening, and humility, which in Freirean (1993/1970, 1998) fashion Mister Rogers encodes into his praxis of mutual humanization. I also suggest that the project of *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* involves more than the modeling of values and the facilitating of positive growing experiences for young children. I propose that Mister Rogers is a communitarian like Aristotle (in Noddings, 1998), but his praxis of engendering a *Neighborhood* community does not call for the inculcation of character in children as Aristotle's does. Noddings writes of Aristotle's belief, "Moral life grows out of the practices in our communities and the demands these practices make on us" (p.13). Mister Rogers demands nothing of his viewers. Rather, he joins them in a humanizing praxis of character development. He models, but he does not teach in the literal sense of the word. He encodes values of good character education, but he does not force these values on his viewers or assess his viewers on the basis of how many of these values they possess. Yet, Mister Rogers models and attends to the cultivation in his viewers of virtues and virtuous practices with which Aristotle likely would have been pleased, as I discuss in the next chapter.

**7.0 AN EDUCATIVE PEDAGOGY OF SILENCE, LISTENING, HUMILITY, AND
OTHER VIRTUES AND VIRTUOUS PRACTICES IN A “STOP AND THINK”
LEARNING CULTURE**

Noddings (1998) explains that “Aristotle believed that the community should inculcate values in children and immerse them in supervised activities designed to develop relevant virtues” (p.13). *Neighborhood* is not a place for inculcating values in children; however, from my analysis of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) I contend that Mister Rogers’ project has been to provide children the resources they need to grow into people of good character. Three of these resources are consistent with values that Freire (1993/1970) associates with a praxis of mutual humanization. These values are silence, listening, and humility.

Freire (1998) writes that “silence makes it possible for the speaker who is really committed to the experience of communication rather than to the simple transmission of information to hear the question, the doubt, the creativity of the person who is listening” (p.104). The slow pacing of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* is meant to give viewers time to reflect and respond because Mister Rogers’ viewers “often join in the dialogue” (Sharapan, 2002; Family Communication Incorporated, 2007, p.1). The silent spaces throughout “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) not only facilitate opportunities for viewers to be active in the dialogue but also affirm the value of reflection and careful thought in a humanizing praxis. The allowance for silence in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) engenders mutual trust between

Mister Rogers and the viewers that the communication happening between them in each episode is truly dialogic.

The “letter visits” that Rogers (1996) has with his viewers attest to this dialogic and affirm this unique trust that Rogers establishes with his viewers. For example, when five-year-old Timmy asks in his letter, “Are you for real?” Rogers explains the dialogic nature of their television visit by responding, “Your television set is a special way that you can see the picture of me and hear my voice. I can’t look out through the television set to see or hear my television friends, but I think about them whenever we make our television visits” (pp.3-4). The relationship Rogers builds with his viewers is a respectful one, according to Sharapan (2002), so Mister Rogers is never patronizing. He wants children, Sharapan adds, to have “a lot of help in understanding this medium that’s so much a part of their everyday lives” (p.33).

As Freire (1998) explains, however, the dialogic nature of mutually humanizing communication is not tied as much to the act of speaking as to the attitude toward listening. Listening, according to Freire, “is a permanent attitude on the part of the subject who is listening, of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other” (p.107). By allowing silence after a question, a song, or a reflection, Mister Rogers is encoding the value of being open to what his viewers are thinking or saying, even though in the studio he can’t hear their voices or know their thoughts. He constructs a culture in which silence and listening are as important as speaking. He also encodes humility as an important value in a learning culture, for as Freire (1993/1970) writes, “How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others?” (p.71)

Within the dialogic experiences that Rogers facilitates for his viewers are two other values that are educative by Deweyan (1938) standards. The first value is the social

responsibility to think of the entire group as a “moving spirit” in which all members have a part (p.54). This claim by Dewey seems to define Rogers’ concept of neighborhood. The second Deweyan (1938) educative value is the development within learners of a “stop and think” attitude that rejects impulsive action and favors more comprehensive and coherent decision making that is informed by reflection on “the union of observation and memory” (p.64). Rogers’ carefully structured allowance for silence and listening throughout “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) seems to facilitate a “stop and think” attitude for every member of the Neighborhood.

7.1 SILENCE IS PART OF A “STOP-AND-THINK” LEARNING CULTURE

According to Freire (1998), a good teacher efficaciously manages to evoke in students a desire to explore their curiosities; often, Freire adds, this does not require the attempt to describe the “‘substantivity’ of some content so that the student may capture it” (p.106). When Mister Rogers rolls toy cars through the piece of vacuum hose he brings in the second episode, only a soft bed of Costa’s piano plays underneath. No narration accompanies Mister Rogers’ exploration; Rogers facilitates the opportunity for viewers to engage in their own exploration as they watch. The same encoding of the value of silence in educative learning exists when Mister Rogers writes the word “Agape” on the legal pad, makes additional links of the construction paper chain, feeds the fish, demonstrates how the flashlight works with batteries, and wonders about several familiar things around the television house. In all of these parts of the story, silence facilitates opportunities for observation and reflection; it encodes the value of, drawing from Dewey (1938), a “stop and think” attitude in an educative learning culture.

Silence can also foster collateral learning experiences beyond the engagement of the present experience, according to Dewey. Mister Rogers demonstrates this claim of educative learning by showing a video in episode two which, again, is accompanied only by Costa's gentle piano play. Encoding one of the show's principal aims—that *Neighborhood* is meant to begin discussions between parents and children (Sharapan, 2002)—Mister Rogers shows the viewers a video montage of parents helping their children to learn in different ways. For example, the video shows: a White mother helping her daughter to roller skate; an African-American mother sitting with her toddler son, who is trying to figure out a puzzle; a White father helping his daughter learn how to shoot a basketball; an Asian mother and her daughter planting flowers together; and a Middle-eastern father and son cooking together.

Besides the communication between parents and children that *Neighborhood* attempts to engender, the video depicts other noteworthy values upon which young viewers are receiving the opportunity to stop and think. One collateral experience from this video is the opportunity to observe that the communication between parents and children applies to both genders and among all races. Furthermore, the video somewhat challenges stereotypes, more so at the time the program was produced in 1992, by showing a Middle-eastern father and son cooking together, and a daughter, rather than a son, working on her foul shot with her father. What Mister Rogers facilitates through these video scenes is his viewers' opportunities to see people as non-normalized. The clips suggest to children that neither gender nor race roles are specific.

From Dewey's (1938) perspective, collateral learning experiences (like these ones) often steer growing learners toward a more expansive continuity of experience. If Dewey is correct, then Rogers' video, shown with no narration and no discussion about the video before or after, might steer some of his young television neighbors toward healthier attitudes about equity and

inclusivity among races and between genders. Here, again, I point out Handler-Spitz's (2003) observation that Mister Rogers' does not impose these attitudes on his viewers; rather, he encodes these values into his interactions with varieties of people that are regularly part of the *Neighborhood*.

7.2 LISTENING IS PART OF A STOP-AND-THINK LEARNING CULTURE

In "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), consistent with Freire's (1993/1970) notion that true dialogue requires "united reflection and action of the dialoguers" rather than a "depositing" of ideas into one another or a simple consumption of ideas between one another (pp.69-70), Mister Rogers actively listens after every question he poses to his viewers. Although he and his viewers are not directly conversing, they are, in Deweyan (1938) language, exercising their freedom to "stop-and-think" about a judgment or reflection. For example, toward the end of the first episode, Mister Rogers looks directly into the camera and asks, "What are some things that *you* can do? Do you ever think of all the many things you've learned to do since you were a tiny baby?" After posing these questions, he pauses for a couple of seconds and listens before continuing the dialogue. He follows the same praxis at the end of episode two when he asks his viewers what they think is causing the wind in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. He also asks them if they have noticed that the wind source may have to do with H.J. Elephant and his Boomerang incantation. He then pauses before he says, "We'll think more about that next time." By these words he not only "listens" to his viewers in the present experience, but he instills faith in them that he will also want to listen to what they think about the wind source in

Make-Believe during the next visit. This is the kind of faith that, according to Freire (1993/1970), builds mutual trust between the dialoguers.

The praxis of mutual humanization through listening is also encoded into the dialogue at the end of episode four. After the Trolley returns from the Make-Believe episode in which the school students have to choose between the learning machine and their field trip, Mister Rogers turns to the camera and asks, “What do you think the children will decide? To put the learning machines on their heads, or to go on the field trip? We’ll think about that more next time.”

The words “next time” encode many of Dewey’s (1938) values of educative experience and Freire’s (1993/1970) values in the praxis of mutual humanization. “Next time” implies that there will be an opportunity for an expansive continuity of experience in the next visit, a growing that will take place from visit to visit, a faith and trust that the next visit will be as humanizing as the present one, and a commitment to ongoing learning through more problem-posing and more co-investigation. Through the words “Next time,” and his standard closing lyric, Rogers’ assures his television friends that

I’ll be back

When the day is new,

And I’ll have more ideas for you.

And you’ll have things you’ll want to talk about,

I will too.

This lyric keeps his and his viewers’ relationships open, and it extends to his viewers the invitation to return the following day.

7.3 HUMILITY IS PART OF A STOP-AND-THINK LEARNING CULTURE

Mister Rogers' attitude that he and his young television friends *have* things to talk about speaks to the humility with which Rogers, through *Neighborhood*, engages in an educative praxis of mutual humanization within a stop-and-think learning culture. True dialogue, as Freire (1993/1970) observes, has no place for arrogance. It does not project nor accuse others of ignorance, it recognizes more than one "I," it does not seek an elite "in-group," and it does not shun partnership (p.71). Instead, true dialogue applies to people who are willing to learn *together* more than they know presently. From Dewey's (1938) perspective, they are willing to stop-and-think about how their decisions impact the collective movement of the entire group.

From a broad perspective, the entire format of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is based on humility because Rogers does not make himself the authority of knowledge and wisdom. More specifically, humility exists in poignant ways in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992). When Mister Rogers acknowledges in episode one that he can not whistle, he manifests humility. By allowing program space for visitors to the *Neighborhood*, Rogers models humility. By always including his television friends in routine tasks like answering the door or the phone, Rogers encodes humility into his praxis of attending to his viewers' need to belong. And, he constructs his Make-Believe story in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) around the *students*, not the adult characters; Daniel Tiger, Prince Tuesday, and Ana Platypus take ownership of their field trip and make the decision on their own not to replace the field trip with James Michael Jones' learning machine. They work with adults on the field trip and receive adult guidance from Mayor Maggie in making the decision, but Mister Rogers constructs the story so the adult characters step back to facilitate a democratic collaboration among the students. All of these examples of the humility that Mister Rogers includes in "Mister Rogers

Talks about Learning” (1992), when analyzed through a Freirean (1993/1970) lens, affirm Freire’s axiom for the existence of true dialogue in the praxis of mutual humanization: “If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue,” writes Freire (p.71). Rogers’ use of silence, his willingness to listen, and his humility are profound cultural values that he encodes in the construction of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992).

7.4 MISTER ROGERS’ “STOP-AND-THINK” CULTURE IS ON THE SIDE OF FREEDOM, NOT AGAINST IT

Experience does not occur in a vacuum, Dewey (1938) suggests. With mutual humanization, problem-posing, and true dialogue as core elements of his praxis, Rogers can not be apolitical as the executive producer and host of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992). Therefore, from a Deweyan (1938) standpoint, one can suggest that Rogers assumes a significant social responsibility for the kind of educative experience he facilitates. His work *is* critical praxis. Constructing a children’s educational television program with pedagogic intent and didactic tone, to employ Carby’s (1993) words, subjects Rogers’ work to a scrutiny of how it attempts to influence the continuity of experiences in the children Rogers has regarded as his television friends and neighbors.

After scrutinizing “Mister Rogers’ Talks about Learning” (1992) through a theoretical framework of Dewey’s (1938, 1944/1916) philosophy of experience and education and Freire’s (1993/1970, 1998) ideas on mutual humanization as educational praxis, the researcher claims that Rogers’ work is on the side of educational freedom, and not against it. The work is true to

Rogers' (1994) words that learning is mostly about facilitating opportunities for young people to become more attuned to their own resources, to realize that their world is but a small part of the overall world, and to understand that their actions affect others.

True freedom, according to Noddings (1998), exists in people only when they claim complete responsibility for the choices they make. Noddings adds that Dewey considered the attainment of this true freedom to be an achievement rather than a right. If this is true, then Rogers' aim through "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) is to facilitate for people the realization of that achievement.

However, the need for a *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* exists because people do not magically become people of good character. Aristotle (in Noddings, 1998) believed that the development of good character required practice. He believed, according to Noddings, that "one learns to be honest by practicing honesty; one learns to be obedient by obeying" (p.14). I want to be careful in my analysis here, however, because I do *not* view Mister Rogers as a character educator. I think of character educators as having prescribed notions of what good character is and how young people should be *taught* good character. Mister Rogers, in a more humanizing praxis of problem-posing, facilitates opportunities for young people to explore their feelings as they participate in educative experiences in order to discover for themselves what good character is. Rogers' (1996) *Neighborhood* is a place in which children can develop the resources to become more attuned to their relationships with others in order to engage in virtuous acts and make good decisions with a greater awareness of how those decisions will impact others.

In "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), Mister Rogers encodes virtues in his practices hoping that his viewers will practice the virtues he encodes. For example, the opening and closing rituals of each episode encode the virtue of attending to others because Mister

Rogers always brings something from work to share with his visitors at the beginning of the program, and he always expresses lyrically to his viewers at the end of each program that he will be interested in what they will want “to talk about” (www.fci.org) the next day.

Mister Rogers practices the virtue of attending to children’s need to belong by having them share in his routine practices of feeding the fish and answering the door or phone. He practices the virtue of caring for all living things by taking care of his fish and his plant; he also practices the virtue of seeing value in all things by turning a piece of vacuum hose into an opportunity to explore. Curiosity is a virtue that Mister Rogers practices not only with his interactions with visitors and his exploration of the vacuum hose but with all of the questions he speaks directly into the camera. He encodes the virtue of loving others by writing the Greek word “Agape” on a legal pad and by showing it to his viewers. He encodes the virtue of respecting others in the dialogue he has with Ella Jenkins, who teaches him the Hindi sign for “I respect you.” He encodes the virtue of accepting one’s own limitations and the limitations of others by visiting with Eric Kloss and by having the reading machine with which Kloss is working read the poem “Be the Best at Whatever You Are.”

And then he extends these virtuous practices into the story that takes place in Neighborhood of Make-Believe. The virtue of respecting the opinions of others, including those of children, is encoded in Mayor Maggie’s encouragement of the Make-Believe students to decide for themselves whether or not to proceed with the field trip they have been planning. Lady Aberlin’s research process to identify the wind source encodes the virtues of patience, dedication to task, and industry. H.J. Elephant’s Boomerang practice encodes similar virtues.

“Virtue is as virtue does” writes Noddings. “When the virtues are well established,” she adds, “people can safely raise questions and engage in critical analysis of the society and its

customs” (p.150). Noddings’ claim is consistent with Freire’s (1993/1970) assertion that only through such a praxis can human beings realize liberation. For Dewey (1938), virtuous practices that lead to other virtuous practices are educative. In the final chapter of my dissertation, I posit how the educative pedagogy of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992) can be expanded into existing teleliteracy frameworks. From the perspective that teleliteracy education also seeks to provide learners with the resources they need to better understand their world and how it connects to others, the work of Mister Rogers applied to these existing frameworks seems like a good fit.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS OF “MISTER ROGERS TALKS ABOUT LEARNING” FOR EXISTING TELELITERACY PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Guba and Lincoln (1989) explain that “constructivists typically enter the frame as learners, not claiming to know preordinately what is salient...constructivists typically face the prospect of not knowing what it is they don’t know” (p.175). When I decided to enter this formal inquiry of Fred Rogers’ work, I had little sense of the unknowns that might inform existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks. I was uncertain about what might emerge in my analysis that could address meaningfully the problematics that seem to impede the advancement of teleliteracy education. My tacit understanding of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, while it initiated my interest in this inquiry, also threatened to mask the deeper layers of this project. A lot of the earliest journal data I recorded during my analysis affirmed this potential study limitation.

In the dialectical struggle of moving back and forth between the abstract and concrete concepts of the multiple texts with which I was working to penetrate those deeper layers of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992), I believe I have unearthed insights that inform existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks in meaningful ways. To begin to draw implications for teleliteracy education from the most salient pieces of my analysis I first return to Zelevansky’s (2004) claim that Mister Rogers’ pedagogy is “radical” (p.196), and I juxtapose

this claim with Sharapan's (2002) explanation that Mister Rogers intended to construct an atmosphere on *Neighborhood* that was safe, trusting, caring, and respectful of his young viewers.

"Fred Rogers' child development training permeated the creation of *Neighborhood* programs," writes Sharapan (2002, p.31). In the way that he respectfully attends to his young viewers in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), Mister Rogers informs existing teleliteracy frameworks. For example, Willis and Carden (2004) assert that spaces for deconstructing media images should invite shared inclusivity. Mister Rogers creates a space in which the viewers feel a sense of belonging, and he includes them in predictable tasks like feeding the fish, answering the door or phone, and beckoning the Trolley for the transition into Make-Believe. He engages the viewers with an interesting variety of experiences in each of the five episodes and avoids the kind of dull and laborious pedagogy that Masterman denounces. His dialogue is often inquiry-based, similar to the teleliteracy frameworks of Hobbs (2006/1994) and CML (2006), but Mister Rogers' inquiry is followed by an unwavering practice of silence and listening. In these ways and others that have been suggested in my analysis, Mister Rogers informs existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks on respectful ways to attend to children and their specific needs as learners.

What made Mister Rogers a radical pedagogue was that the respect he showed for children in many ways defied the Aristotelian (in Noddings, 1998) convention that children *need* to be inculcated with the values of good character in order to grow into morally responsible adults who have learned how to reason well. On the surface, however, Rogers does not seem to defy this convention. Noddings (1998) writes of Aristotle:

He was not concerned with teaching (children) to reason about moral matters.

Indeed, he believed that young people were not ready for such reasoning until

sometime in their twenties. By then, he argued, they would be good (virtuous) people and could be trusted to analyze moral issues. Before that time they should learn to respond ethically out of the habits of good character. In turn, this good character would furnish the ground upon which future reasoning might be safely conducted. (p.13)

On a surface level Mister Rogers' *Neighborhood* pedagogy could be regarded as Aristotelian. For example, in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), he does not moralize, he never explicitly tells his viewers what good character means, and in Deweyan (1938) fashion he provides opportunities for his viewers to develop good habits in the way they think, act, and learn. Furthermore, Mister Rogers never *directly* solicits reasoning from his viewers in any of the five episodes on learning. Learning without reasoning seems like inculcation, but in "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992) it is not. Perhaps those that have oversentimentalized or parodied *Neighborhood* (Zelevansky, 2004) could not see that a deeper part of what makes Mister Rogers' pedagogy radical is that Mister Rogers invites young children to think, reflect, learn, and sometimes reason in what might be viewed as adult ways.

The ways that Mister Rogers builds this respectful relationship with his viewers might meaningfully inform existing teleliteracy pedagogical frameworks. First, his pedagogy of problem-posing is both respectful and educative. By asking viewers what they think might happen in the next episode of Make-Believe, or by asking them if they ever wonder, or by asking them if they ever think about the many things they have learned to do since they were babies, he invites them to reflect and to reason. By providing a Make-Believe experience in which the puppet students both plan their own field trip and then decide collaboratively to choose the field

trip over the learning machine, Mister Rogers acknowledges the ability to reason that can exist in young people when given the space and encouragement by adults to engage in such reasoning.

An insight emerges for existing teleliteracy pedagogy from this praxis of respect for children's ability to reason. While framers of existing teleliteracy pedagogy have built critical thinking and awareness into their models, encouraged teleliteracy spaces to be democratic and collaborative, and have mapped skill development processes for how learners might use their reasoning to deconstruct potentially exploitive television material, they might consider also the ways Rogers shows respect for learners as a possibility for strengthening their frameworks.

One way that existing frameworks might be informed by Rogers' pedagogy of respect for the learner is through the notion of acknowledging reasoning in young people *implicitly* instead of *explicitly*. Giving students questions for deconstructing popular television programming might be too prescriptive; it might be inculcating in students cynicism toward popular television shows and commercial advertising based more on what Dewey (1938) would call a cause than a habit. If so, the experience is miseducative, according to Dewey. Rogers' pedagogical strategy is more likely to problem-pose—to ask children to talk about what they see and to form their own questions for what might not feel right about the programming. Students could deliberate on the questions *they* generate in order to exercise their natural curiosities, a practice that Rogers advocated (Rogers, 1996).

Rogers' praxis of respecting the learner in humanizing ways is likely to generate a more authentic dialogue among students because of the mutual trust that, I believe, can emerge between the facilitator and the students, and among the students themselves. Following Rogers' lead, facilitators have to take a leap of faith in letting go of the control over the direction of the learning in the teleliteracy experiences they facilitate for their students. If the learning is

becoming more destructive than constructive, then, as Dewey (1938) advocates, facilitators must use their wisdom and experience to steer the experiences in healthier directions. However, facilitators of teleliteracy experiences should not feel as though they alone are responsible for being the adult presence in the student deliberations they engender.

“The *Neighborhood* programs are meant to be a beginning of discussion, not an end,” explains Sharapan (2002, p.32). A *Neighborhood* experience is meant to start conversations that will continue with parents and other caring adults in humanizing ways. This part of Rogers’ pedagogy should please the scholars in the field who want parents to become more involved in talking with children about the popular media in which they engage. However, some of these scholars would like to see parents decide for their children what is enriching and what is degrading in their popular culture. Rogers, on the other hand, believed that “attitudes are caught, not taught” (Sharapan, 2002), a *Neighborhood* theme that Maggie Stewart voices in “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” (1992). The entire format of “Mister Rogers Talks about Learning” affirms Rogers’ belief in this old Quaker virtue. That’s why Rogers liked the way Isaac’s father (Isaac was the little boy who insisted that Mister Rogers’ did not “poop”) approached the conversation with his son. Isaac’s father did not dictate or teach; he deliberated with his son. He posed questions that showed respect for Isaac’s ability to reason. He facilitated for Isaac the opportunity to question Mister Rogers through a letter, to exercise his natural curiosities, and to explore and discover his own learning.

I acknowledge that this exchange of dialogue on Mister Rogers’ bodily functions may not seem profound to some. However, when I draw implications for existing teleliteracy pedagogical framework from Rogers’ praxis of starting dialogues with children that are intended to be continued with adults, *especially* when applied to certain encoded values in “Mister Rogers

Talks about Learning” (1992) that seem very profound, I see tremendous value for teleliteracy education. For example, when Mister Rogers visits with Ella Jenkins, who teaches him the Hindi sign for “I respect you” (Episode 2), he potentially starts a conversation on the respect that should exist among people of different races and genders. When Mister Rogers demonstrates that fancy toys can not run without batteries in order to encode the message that what is on the inside is as important as what is on the outside, he potentially begins a dialogue on how children do not need to have fancy material possessions to be people of value. When Mister Rogers, as he is feeding the fish, talks about how no one can do everything, pointing out that fish can not live out of water and people can not live under water forever, or when Mister Rogers “has some ideas” (Episode 2) for a piece of vacuum hose that a neighbor was going to throw away, he perhaps encourages children to talk with adults about the value of all living and nonliving things. When Mister Rogers visits with Eric Kloss and focuses on Kloss’ skills of mastering a reading machine and playing saxophone rather than his impairment of sight, Mister Rogers might begin a conversation between children and parents on accepting rather than feeling sorry for the disabled because all human beings live with challenges.

Perhaps existing teleliteracy frameworks, which also have critical underpinnings, could be strengthened by facilitating more than the application of critical skills to other media texts. Perhaps existing frameworks could also be more dedicated to having young people continue the conversations that begin from their teleliteracy experiences with their parents and other caring adults in their families and communities. Through these extended dialogues young people might become more critically conscious of how gender and racial inequality, for example, are portrayed subtly and not so subtly in television programming. They might dialogue into a more acute awareness that they, as young consumers, often are exploited by the media. They might discuss

with caring adults how respect for all things living and nonliving is often lost in greed and self-centeredness, or they might become more critically aware of how people with disabilities often are portrayed on television in ways that are intended to evoke viewer sympathy rather than viewer acceptance.

The television programming that students might have to watch in order to dialogue with adults about these kinds of critical constructs would probably be challenged on its appropriateness for a school setting. In the pre-high school grades, this would certainly be an issue. *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, however, can start the beginnings of critical conversations between young children and adults without raising the school-*in*appropriate red flag.

Additional value I see in Rogers' work, however, applies to levels beyond preschool and early elementary education. I have noticed an interesting irony in the students at the high school where I have taught for sixteen years. Adolescents that seem to operate from a questionable code at best also seem to draw from a different and usually healthier set of values when they are working with or for young children. For instance, I used to have my students create children's books for the second grade students that my mother was teaching at the time. I would often marvel that some of the most troublesome students would create some of the most caring books.

One strand of media literacy education is the creation strand. Livingstone (2004) notes that creation is one skill of media literacy which requires a lot more study. Advocates like Hobbs (2006/1994, 2004) have been successful at initiating in some schools this strand of media literacy pedagogy that aims to increase literacy through student hands-on work with various media forms. I am not suggesting by this discussion that students attempt to imitate Mister Rogers. Rather, after a teliteracy engagement *Neighborhood* and deliberations about the value of Rogers' educative pedagogy in a humanizing praxis, they might create some kind of

children's educational media in which they encode values they believe are important for young children to explore. *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* could continue to be both a resource for facilitating educative experiences in the praxis of mutual humanization for young children as it also becomes a model for how older students could plan and produce their own value-laden educational television programming designed for young children. Pre-service teachers preparing to teach all ages of students could also become teliterate in the *Neighborhood* in order to become facilitators of these experiences for the students they will eventually teach.

Besides research on what would happen when older students use *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as a pedagogical model for creating their own children's television production, another research direction from this study could be to analyze other educational television programs for their pedagogical value to teliteracy education. Other types of television that, using Carby's (1993) words, are pedagogic in intent and didactic in tone might also shed light on how existing teliteracy frameworks may be strengthened.

8.1 FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE ANALYSIS

While current teliteracy advocates include in their frameworks many of the values that Rogers encodes in his praxis, and like Thoman and Jolls (2004), who represent the framework set forth by the Center for Media Literacy, claim that teliteracy has the power to facilitate global interconnectivity, Rogers' work *today* might be more effectively directed toward a critical transformation of young people's generally dehumanizing code. As in Rogers' pedagogy, existing teliteracy frameworks are constructed on democratic inclusivity, emerging awareness, critical thinking, reflection, and critical action taken by more literate decision makers who have

become more consciously aware of the powerful influences that television and other popular media can exert on them. But are existing teleliteracy praxes facilitating opportunities for young people to reflect upon what it even means to be a learner in the world today? Are they as dedicated as they need to be to the urgency for more expansive continuity of experiences in young people? Do these frameworks build in enough patience to allow both students and teachers as unfinished beings to discover what it means to engage in consciousness as consciousness of consciousness? Do teleliteracy educators succumb to the challenge of how to make such slowly and densely evolving processes attractive to students?

The “fast food” culture that young people seem to embrace today unquestionably raises doubts about the effectiveness that a slow paced show like *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* would have in the classroom. However, the program still runs in the vast majority of PBS markets; it is still very popular with both children and adults. It certainly eliminates the contentiousness of using school appropriate content for teleliteracy experiences. And frankly, the researcher has received nothing but positive reaction to his dissertation topic. People still cherish Mister Rogers and his *Neighborhood*. More importantly, they still seem to recognize value in his work.

Challenges to a *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* inspired teleliteracy framework would undoubtedly arise, especially from those who believe that standards-based education allows little room for the time and expense that this kind of pedagogical framework would require. But in 1969, when public television was lobbying for twenty million dollars it desperately needed from the federal government, a “crusty” Rhode Island Senator, John Pastore, sat in hearings as the pivotal vote. Unconvinced that PBS deserved the money and wanting to break for lunch, Pastore was prepared to solicit the comments of the next speaker, Fred Rogers, in writing. Instead, Rogers spoke for only ten minutes; he spent most of that time reciting lyrics from one of his

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood songs that encouraged children to discover feelings about themselves that are hard to understand. To make a long story short, Rogers' changed the senator's mind and earned PBS \$20 million dollars it desperately needed. Pastore remarked, "I'm supposed to be a tough guy, but this is the first time I've had goose bumps in two days. I think it's wonderful. Looks like you've just earned the \$20 million (Stewart, 1999, p.100-101).

Thirty-eight years ago, Fred Rogers softened a gritty senator from Rhode Island by convincing him that children needed space to explore feelings that are hard to understand. The *Neighborhood* was and continues to be that space for young children. As Zoba (2000, March 6) observes, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* has awakened the hearts of children, and now I contend it must also awaken the hearts of adults. In its gentle and non-threatening way, it can help us adults to be more mindful that children everywhere are watching us to learn *how* to become adults. Unfortunately, the critical layers of Rogers' *Neighborhood* project, perhaps because the series has been inextricably linked to a preschooler audience, seem to have been largely overlooked. Through the critical underpinnings of my analysis of "Mister Rogers Talks about Learning" (1992), I have attempted to avoid the domestication of Rogers' work that seems to have permeated many of the writings on *Neighborhood*.

Although Rogers and Family Communications, Incorporated, were and are committed to families, I believe the concept of *Neighborhood* challenges us to imagine what the entire world could be like by committing its critical attentiveness to the human conditions of self and others as praxis. The *Neighborhood* is a model of how, from a Deweyan (1938, 1944/1916) and Freirean (1993/1970, 1998) standpoint, educative learning experiences in mutually humanizing spaces and practices could facilitate the co-exploration and co-discovery of the values and

character that might sprinkle some hope around the world that a global connectivity—more so a global community of people who think of themselves as neighbors—someday could be achieved.

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