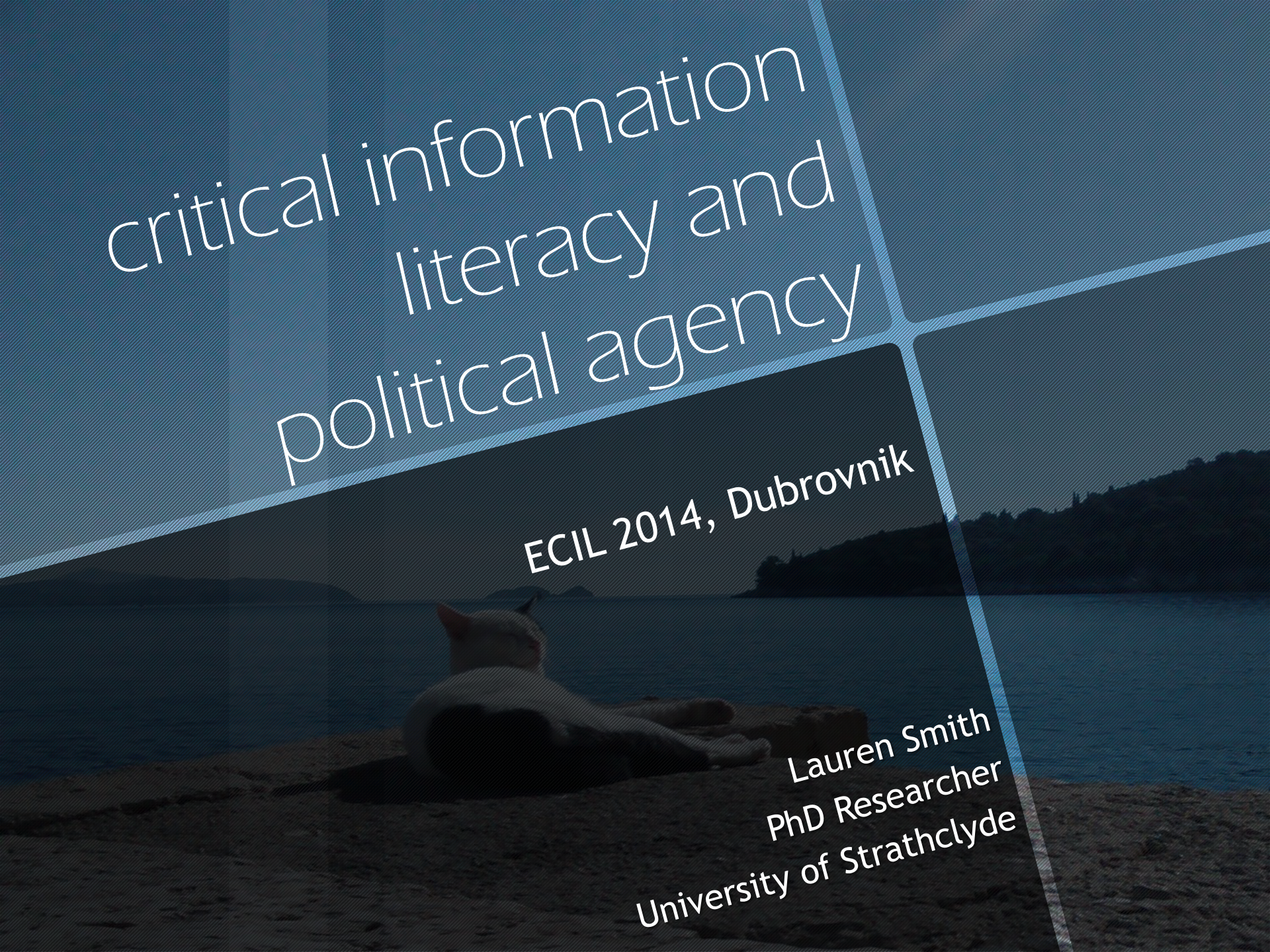


# critical information literacy and political agency

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# Introduction

- Context
  - Youth engagement
  - Political agency
  - Information literacy
- Critical/radical information literacy
- What methodological approaches are appropriate?
  - Phenomenography
  - Personal construct theory
  - Critical pedagogy
- Initial findings
- How is this useful to theory and practice?





50 MILLION ANIMALS KILLED




FOR THEIR FUR EVERY YEAR

FUR IS  
MURDER

FUR IS  
MURDER

youth engagement



- 
- Awareness of social injustice and inequality
  - Thinking and information abilities to effect change
  - Belief in ability to change society
  - Desire to participate



At every moment democracy has to be struggled for. So the question becomes, how do we educate students to believe that schools are more than simply vehicles for social and economic mobility, but in fact provide a noble service essential for expanding power, economic and political, so that various groups can participate in the shaping of the nation? How do we educate students to believe that, in fact, schools should be the first line of defense in taking up the issue of equity, justice and freedom? Giroux (1994, p.164)



The background features a dark, textured surface with large, light-colored geometric shapes, including a prominent triangle and a square. A silhouette of a hand holding a pen is visible in the lower right corner, pointing towards the text.

# Information Literacy

Hamelink (1976) views  
information literacy as  
political and context-specific,  
and oriented towards  
empowering the usually  
disempowered in society



*A new “information literacy” is necessary for liberation from the oppressive effects of the institutionalized public media.*

*The first step toward “information literacy” is to recognize that access to information starts from where the information users are.*

An alternative to  
news,

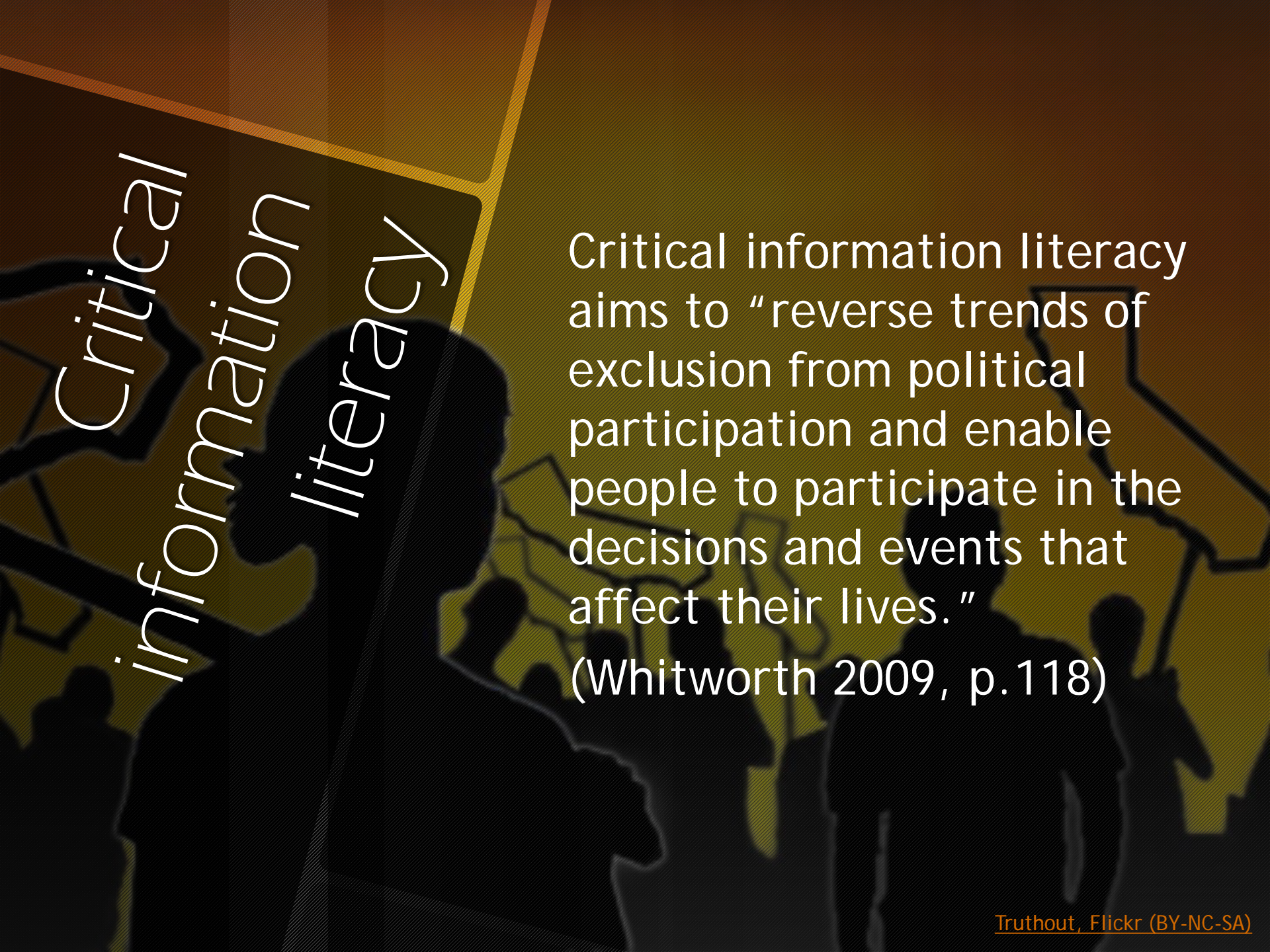


# Banking concept

- The **media inform** and the audience is **being informed**.
- The media know everything and the **audience knows nothing**.
- The media talk and the audience listens - **meekly**.
- The media choose and **enforce** their choice and the audience **complies**.
- The media act and the audience has the **illusion of acting** through the action of the media.
- The media choose content and the audience **adapts** to it.
- The media are the subject of the informational process, while the **audience is merely its object**.



# Critical information literacy

The background of the slide features a dark brown and olive green color scheme. On the left, there is a large, dark silhouette of a person's head and shoulders. To the right of this, there are several smaller, lighter-colored silhouettes of people, some of whom appear to be holding up mobile devices. In the background, a faint outline of the African continent is visible.

Critical information literacy aims to “reverse trends of exclusion from political participation and enable people to participate in the decisions and events that affect their lives.”

(Whitworth 2009, p.118)



# Critical information literacy can be used to

- Explain biases
- Foster critical thinking
- Interrogate assumptions
- Question validity
- Challenge dehumanisation  
(Whitworth 2009)



# Radical information literacy

“[T]he ability to communicate effectively in a variety of landscapes, to learn from the resultant dialogue, and, ultimately, to understand how to transform one’s own world, and the cognitive authorities which constrain it.”  
(Whitworth 2014)



# barriers

- Learner willingness to engage with new approaches to education
- Limited resources to engage with new approaches
- Confidence and knowledge of librarians to engage with critical approaches to information literacy
- Ideological conflict
- Neoliberal dominance of education
- Librarians' lack of power to enforce jurisdiction
- Critical pedagogical rejection of frameworks





# Methodological approach





Phenomenography

Personal  
Construct  
Theory

Critical  
Pedagogy

Theo  
ry



# Critical Pedagogy

"Critical pedagogy currently offers the best, perhaps the only, chance for young people to develop the knowledge, skills, and sense of responsibility needed for them to participate in and exercise the leadership necessary for them to govern the prevailing social order."

(Giroux 2012, pp.116-17)



# phenomenography

- Interpretivist research
- Used in educational research
- Looks at how individuals make sense of the world
- Identifies variations in understanding within participant group
- All ways of understanding a phenomenon are valid
- Provides a strong theoretical basis for qualitative research looking at perceptions and understanding



# Research methods

- Questionnaires
- Repertory grid interviews
- Focus groups
- Class observations
- Class activities



# Repertory grids

- Personal construct theory from clinical and social psychology
- Constructs and mental models of the world
- Participants identified ten places, people or things from which they get information about politics, current events and the world around them
- Participants identified similarities and differences in how they conceive of the sources



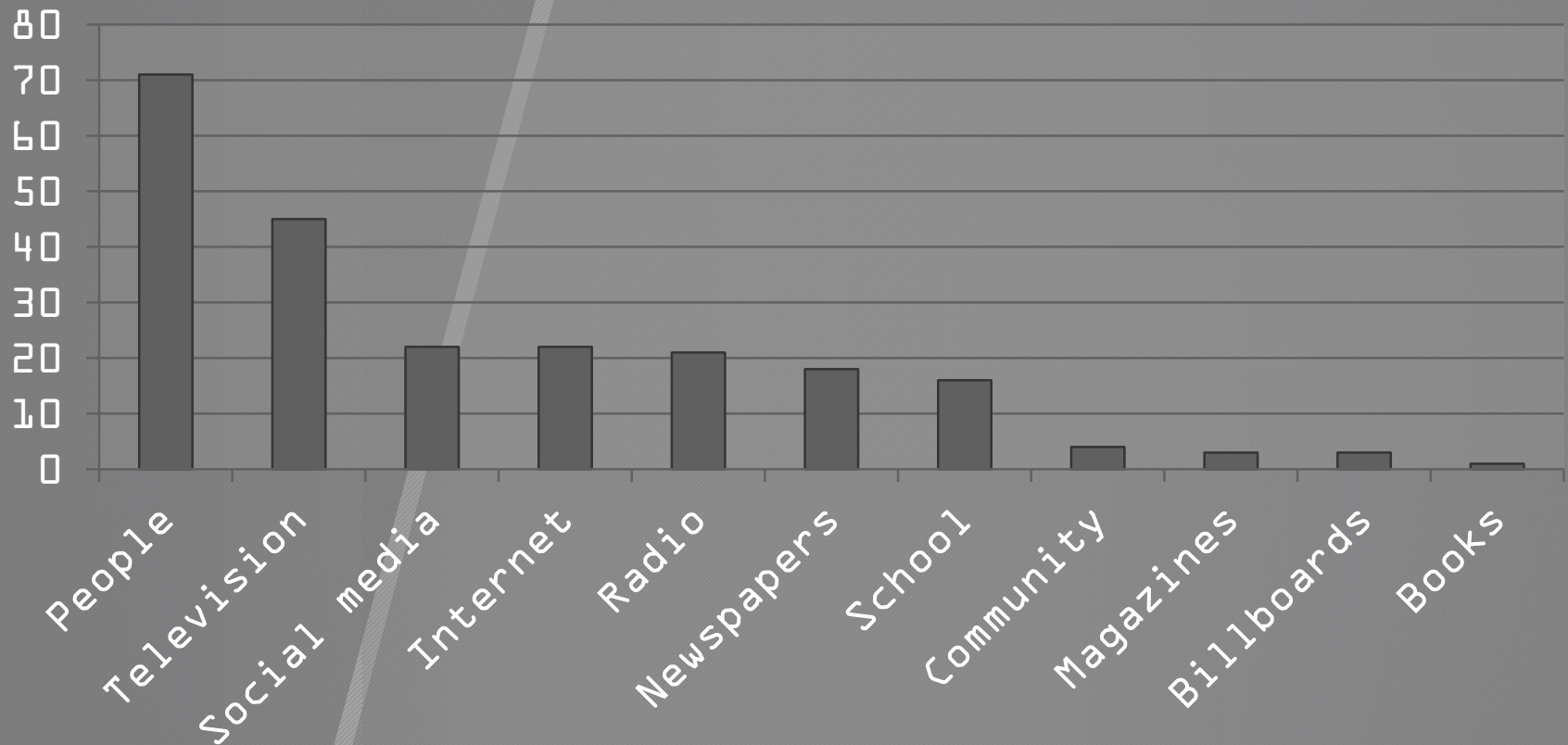
|                         | Newsround | Capital FM | BBC News Website | Facebook | The Sun | Friends | BBC R1 | GMTV | Mum | Dad |                         |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|------------------|----------|---------|---------|--------|------|-----|-----|-------------------------|
| Less interesting        | 9         | 10         | 7                | 9        | 6       | 9       | 6      | 5    | 8   | 9   | More interesting        |
| Less explicit           | 1         | 6          | 4                | 9        | 7       | 8       | 6      | 2    | 1   | 1   | Explicit                |
| No images               | 7         | 1          | 6                | 10       | 6       | 1       | 5      | 7    | 1   | 1   | Images and videos       |
| National                | 2         | 4          | 10               | 3        | 6       | 2       | 4      | 1    | 2   | 3   | International           |
| Use less frequently     | 9         | 10         | 6                | 10       | 7       | 8       | 6      | 5    | 6   | 7   | Use more frequently     |
| Lots of info            | 2         | 7          | 1                | 8        | 2       | 8       | 2      | 4    | 3   | 6   | Not as much info        |
| Narrower variety        | 7         | 8          | 10               | 4        | 6       | 3       | 7      | 5    | 5   | 6   | Wider variety           |
| Costs money             | 10        | 10         | 10               | 10       | 6       | 10      | 10     | 10   | 10  | 10  | Doesn't cost money      |
| Purpose is to inform    | 1         | 3          | 2                | 8        | 3       | 7       | 3      | 3    | 6   | 6   | Purpose is to entertain |
| Earlier in the day      | 1         | 5          | 5                | 5        | 7       | 5       | 8      | 1    | 5   | 5   | Later in the day        |
| Younger audience        | 2         | 6          | 7                | 3        | 6       | 7       | 6      | 8    | 5   | 5   | Older audience          |
| Hear different opinions | 6         | 8          | 10               | 10       | 3       | 7       | 5      | 4    | 10  | 10  | Hear some opinions      |
| Less reliable           | 8         | 7          | 8                | 5        | 9       | 7       | 8      | 7    | 8   | 8   | Reliable                |
| Trust in knowledge less | 10        | 9          | 6                | 1        | 7       | 2       | 7      | 6    | 9   | 9   | Trust in knowledge more |
| Relevant to women       | 5         | 6          | 7                | 5        | 8       | 5       | 5      | 4    | 1   | 10  | Relevant to men         |
| Less opinionated        | 5         | 5          | 5                | 9        | 10      | 8       | 4      | 5    | 6   | 9   | More opinionated        |
| Biased                  | 9         | 7          | 10               | 4        | 8       | 9       | 9      | 9    | 7   | 5   | Not biased              |



| Television                   |   | People             |    | Newspapers        |   |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------|----|-------------------|---|
| BBC News                     | 9 | Father             | 16 | The Sun           | 5 |
| Daybreak                     | 6 | Mother             | 15 | Daily Mail        | 4 |
| BBC 10 O'Clock News          | 4 | Friends            | 12 | Not specified     | 2 |
| ITV News                     | 3 | Grandmother        | 10 | Metro             | 1 |
| Unspecified                  | 3 | Grandfather        | 7  | Daily Express     | 1 |
| Calendar News                | 3 | Brother            | 2  | Daily Mirror      | 1 |
| BBC Breakfast News           | 2 | Uncle              | 2  | Independent       | 1 |
| BBC Look North News          | 2 | Teacher            | 2  | Telegraph app     | 1 |
| Channel 4 News               | 1 | Sister             | 2  | Free Press online | 1 |
| CBBC Newsround               | 1 | Sister's boyfriend | 1  | Daily Mail online | 1 |
| Bloomberg News               | 1 | Group tutor        | 1  | Internet          |   |
| Sky News                     | 1 | Aunt               | 1  | Google            | 4 |
| CNN                          | 1 | Social Media       |    | BBC Website       | 4 |
| BBC Six O'Clock News         | 1 | Facebook           | 13 | Yahoo headlines   | 3 |
| Channel 5 News               | 1 | Twitter            | 6  | Phone news app    | 2 |
| GMTV                         | 1 | MSN Messenger      | 1  | AOL headlines     | 2 |
| Andrew Marr Show             | 1 | Emails             | 1  | News articles     | 1 |
| Mock the Week                | 1 | Snapchat           | 1  | Wikipedia         | 1 |
| Russell Howard Show          | 1 | Magazines          |    | BBC News app      | 1 |
| 8 Out of 10 Cats             | 1 | Unspecified        | 2  | Youtube           | 1 |
| BBC Question Time            | 1 | Fashion magazines  | 1  | ITV News online   | 1 |
| School                       |   | Radio              |    | Tumblr            | 1 |
| World News Wednesday         | 4 | Unspecified        | 2  | "Searching"       | 1 |
| Tutor group                  | 1 | Trax FM            | 1  | Community         |   |
| Public services lessons      | 1 | BBC Radio One      | 6  | Banners           | 2 |
| Religious Education lessons  | 2 | BBC Radio 2        | 3  | Village meetings  | 1 |
| Personal Development lessons | 4 | Capital FM         | 7  | Newsletters       | 1 |
| History lessons              | 1 | Hallam FM          | 2  | Other             |   |
| Expressive Arts lessons      | 1 | Books              |    | Billboards        | 3 |
| School website               | 2 | Animal Farm        | 1  |                   |   |



# Sources of Political Information





# constructs



## Constructs describing practical features of the information, source or its use

- Format of information
- Geographical coverage
- Location of information
- Topic coverage
- Political content
- Frequency of use
- Time of use
- Place of use
- Location of speaker
- Audience characteristics
- Size of audience
- Financial cost
- Communication between speakers

Practical  
aspects



## Constructs assessing the suitability of the information

- Relevance of information
- Amount of information
- Tone of information
- Speed of information acquisition
- Level of complexity
- Level of knowledge
- Clarity of information
- Currency of information
- Accuracy of information
- Quality of information
- Level of technology
- Truth of information
- Level of privacy
- Reliability of information
- Validity of information
- Importance of information

*Suitability*



## Constructs assessing the authority of the source

- Identity of source
- Type of speaker
- Personality of source
- Standing of source
- Freedom of source
- Trust in source
- Intentions or motive of source
- Outlook of source
- Morals of source
- Political affiliation/ position
- Opinions of source
- Level of formality
- Modernity of source
- Experience of source

Authority



# motive

"The Sun's obviously put down to journalists and they want to get more readers and everything so you don't really know if it's true or not." (P28)



# Reliability

"BBC News is very believable; in The Daily Mail everything kills you." (P21)

"But in The Metro it's more like facts and the truth and it's all true so it's not just opinions." (P28)

I think, Mum would have more reliable information [than television news], not perfect though because obviously either way it's coming from somebody else's mouth so it's gonna be different and it's what they interpret it as." (P23)



# Neutrality

"Well BBC News is a very neutral sort of thing so they'll have somebody who thinks one thing, and somebody who thinks another, and they'll always have that so that people can get two sides of the story, which makes you have the full story, as opposed to The Daily Mail which commits bias by omission." (P21)



# Questioning authority

"I think because it comes from a supposedly reliable source, like from the government. I think that's the beauty about the government. They report on the government activities, I kind of believe it more...but I don't always think you can trust the government." (FG1, P2)



## Constructs describing affective responses to the source or information

- Emotional association
- Ability to relate to source
- Interest in source
- Entertainment
- Agreement/ disagreement with source
- Influence of information

"I have an opinion on the news where I find news really depressing and bad. I don't really like to watch it because I find it puts me in a bad mood!" (P16)

Constructs



## Constructs describing how the participant uses the information

- Ability to use
- Ability to understand the information
- Choice about use

"I find Google really easy to use, it's there in your everyday life, it's at school, at home, it's on your phone."  
(P16)

Use of  
information



## Constructs describing a sociopolitical understanding about the source

- Cultural context of information
- Social class
- Level of comfort with source

## Constructs describing how the participant communicates with the source

- Ability to communicate with the speaker
- What communication between source and participant is like

Sociopolitical  
context and  
relationship with  
source



# Racism and stereotype

"My mum always goes on about, how people are taking other taxpayers' money. She works in town and, whenever she goes out for lunch, she sees people at 12 and in the afternoon on a Tuesday, walking around with their friends. She says some of them you can tell are off work, but others you can tell they are on benefits. Sometimes it is like a stereotype, but quite a few times it is true." (FG1, P2)

"I don't agree with immigrants coming in. You're walking through town and they're in the way. Move!" (FG1, P3)



# ideal behaviours

"I think the BBC News is there for people who are more intelligent. I'm not saying that unintelligent people aren't bothered about news or politics, but I don't think they would go in-depth into finding out, if you know what I mean. If they got some information off their family I think they'd just accept that rather than researching further into it."  
(P7)



- Broad range of information sources
- Understanding of political information often superficial
- Some critical analysis does occur, often supported by concepts learnt at school (e.g. purpose of text)
- Focus tends to be on 'practical' characteristics rather than critical appraisal of content
- Did not often talk about differences between types of format
- Emotions strongly associated with sources:
  - More likely to engage with content viewed as entertaining
  - Disengagement with "sad" and "depressing" content

Initial findings



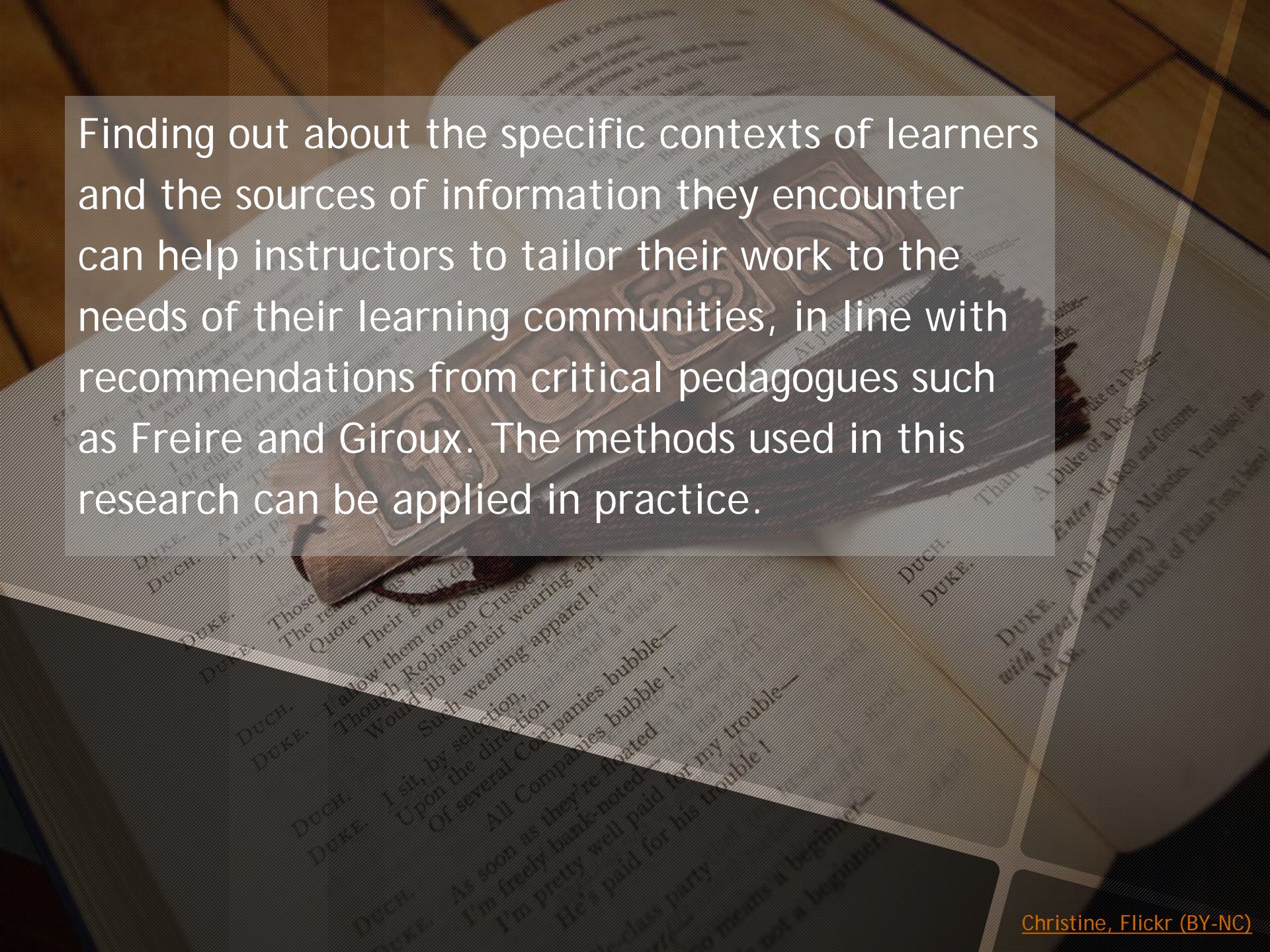
| <b>Emerging Themes &amp; Issues</b>  | <b>Critical Theory</b>  |
|--|---|
| Understanding of media bias (omission, selection, placement, labelling, spin)                      | Media literacy (Giroux, 2007, pp.229-241)   |
| View of schooling as preparation for work, not learning how to be a citizen                        | Marketisation of education, democratic public spheres (Giroux, 2012, pp.36-37)            |
| View of young people as not knowledgeable or responsible enough to participate in politics         | Manufactured cynicism (Giroux, 2006, p.83)  |
| Trust in media to report all 'important' news, faith that media will tell truth                    | Media literacy (Giroux, 2007, pp.229-241), critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2011)               |
| Influence of images in the media on how participants feel about current events and world conflict  | Culture of fear (Giroux, 2006, pp.200-201)  |
| Interpretation of violence and formation of political attitudes relating to it                     | Consumerism, masculinity, violence, politics, gender relations (Giroux, 2006, pp.205-225) |
| Debating and understanding structure of arguments – applying this to own lives                     | Politics of possibility (Giroux, 2006, pp.229-236)  |
| Concerns about welfare, benefits and immigration. Knowledge or understanding of economic situation | Ideological hegemony (Giroux, 2011, p.22)   |
| View of young people as a homogenous group, influenced by media portrayals                         | Youth panic (Giroux, 2011, p.91)  |



A large number of green paper clips are scattered across a black background, creating a dense, textured pattern. The clips are oriented in various directions, some overlapping each other.

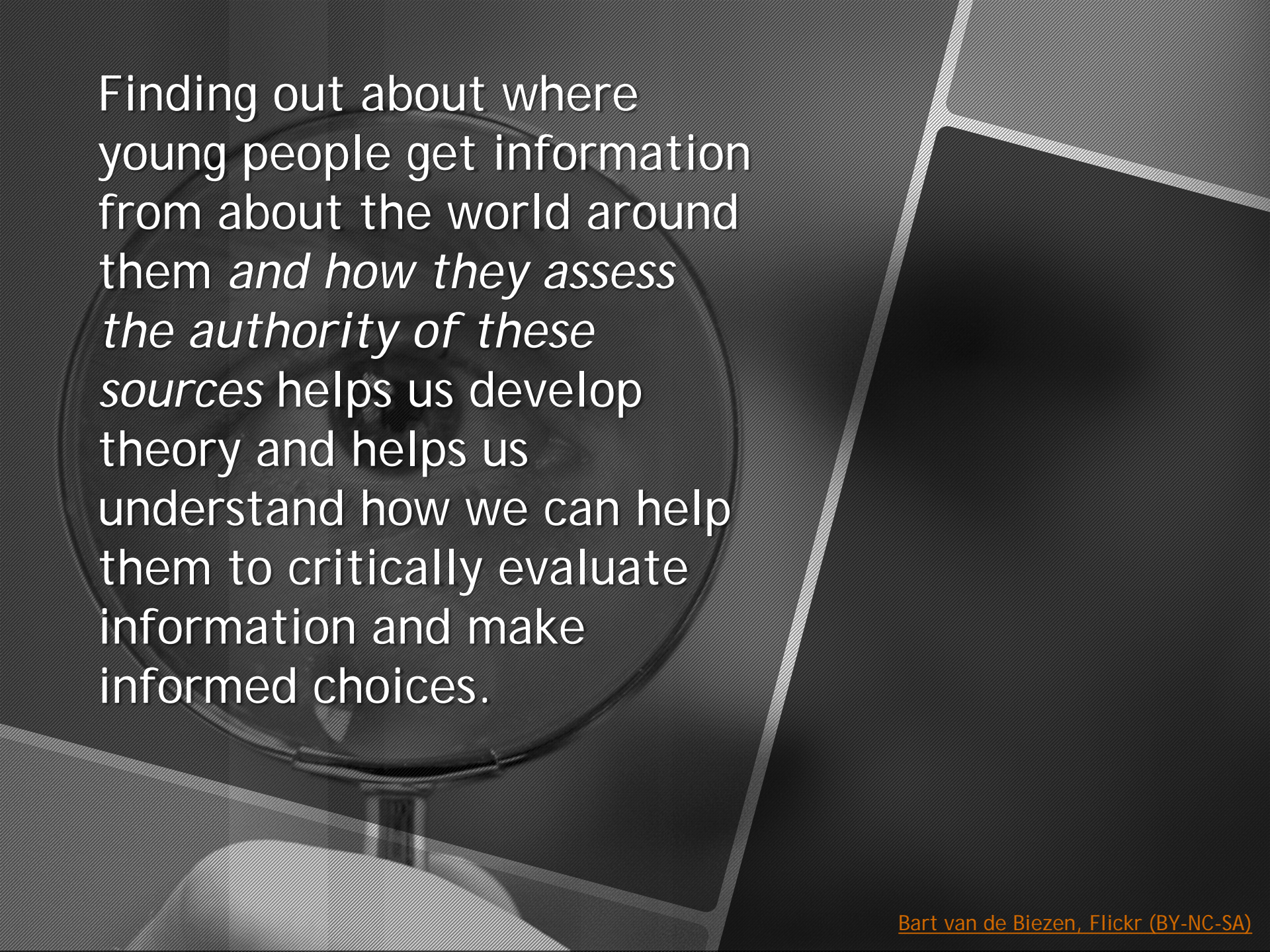
# Use in practice





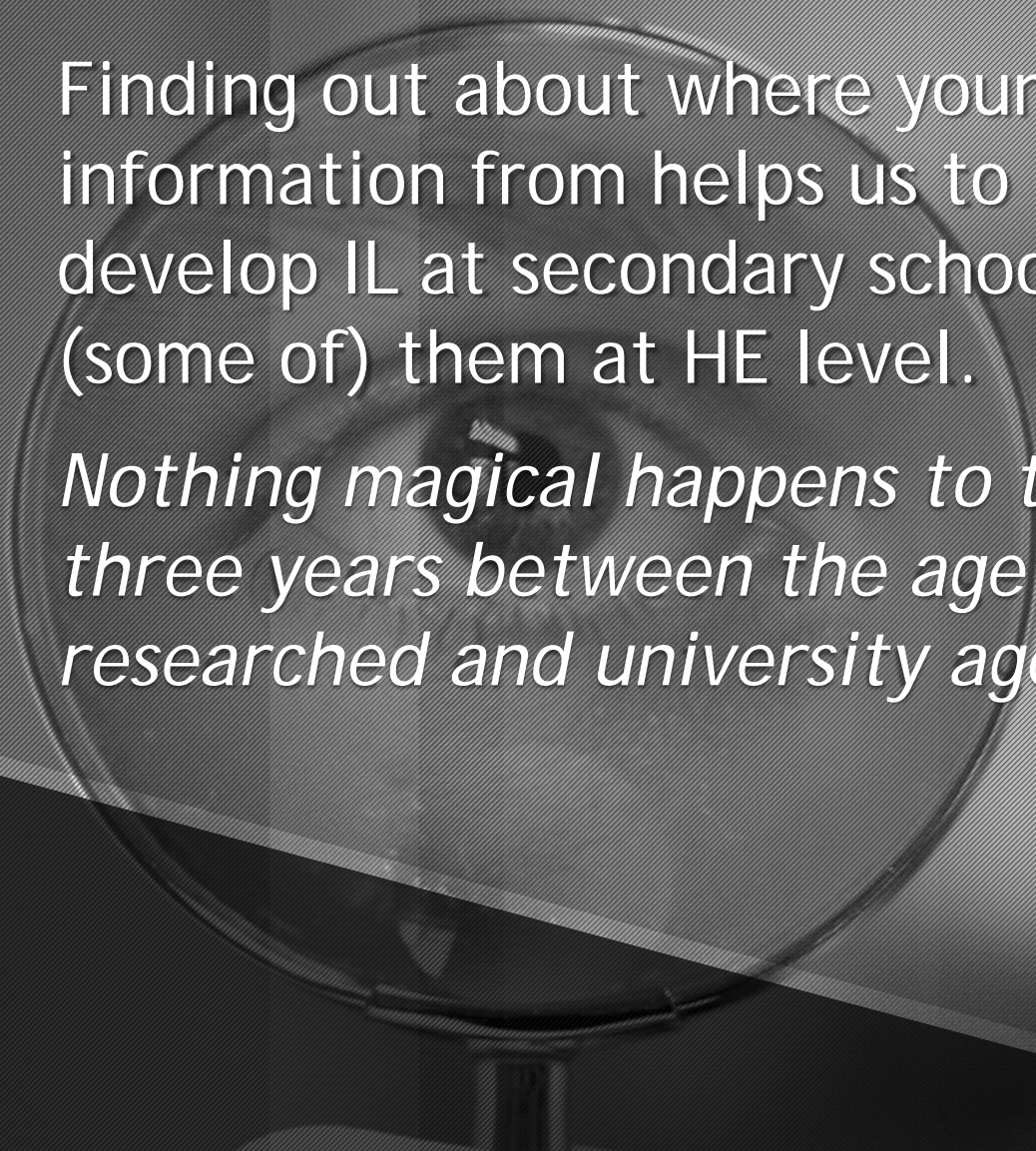
Finding out about the specific contexts of learners and the sources of information they encounter can help instructors to tailor their work to the needs of their learning communities, in line with recommendations from critical pedagogues such as Freire and Giroux. The methods used in this research can be applied in practice.



A hand holding a magnifying glass over a dark surface, with text overlaid. The text is white and reads: Finding out about where young people get information from about the world around them *and how they assess the authority of these sources* helps us develop theory and helps us understand how we can help them to critically evaluate information and make informed choices.

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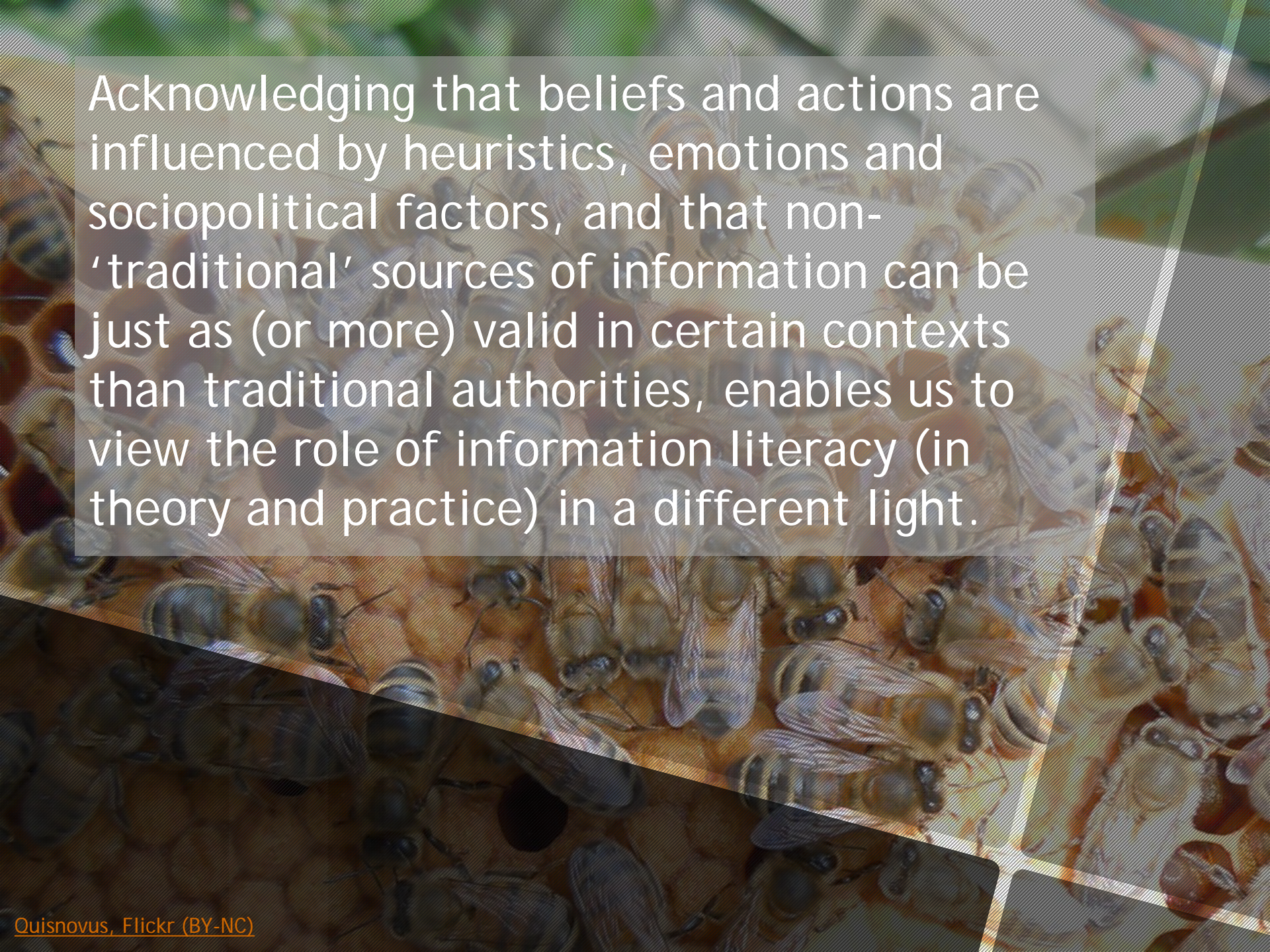




Finding out about where young people get information from helps us to help the develop IL at secondary school level but also (some of) them at HE level.

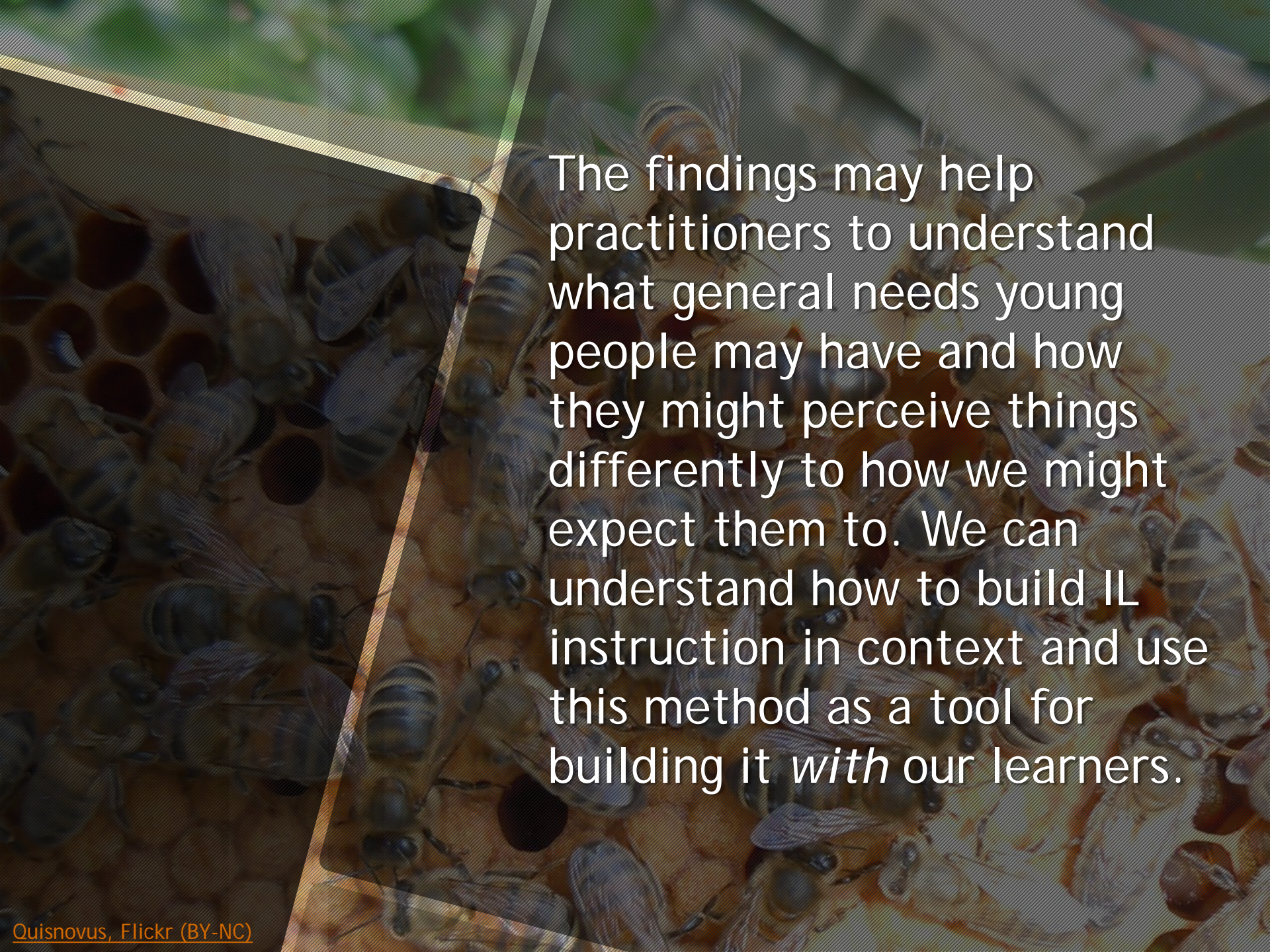
*Nothing magical happens to them over the three years between the age group I researched and university age!*





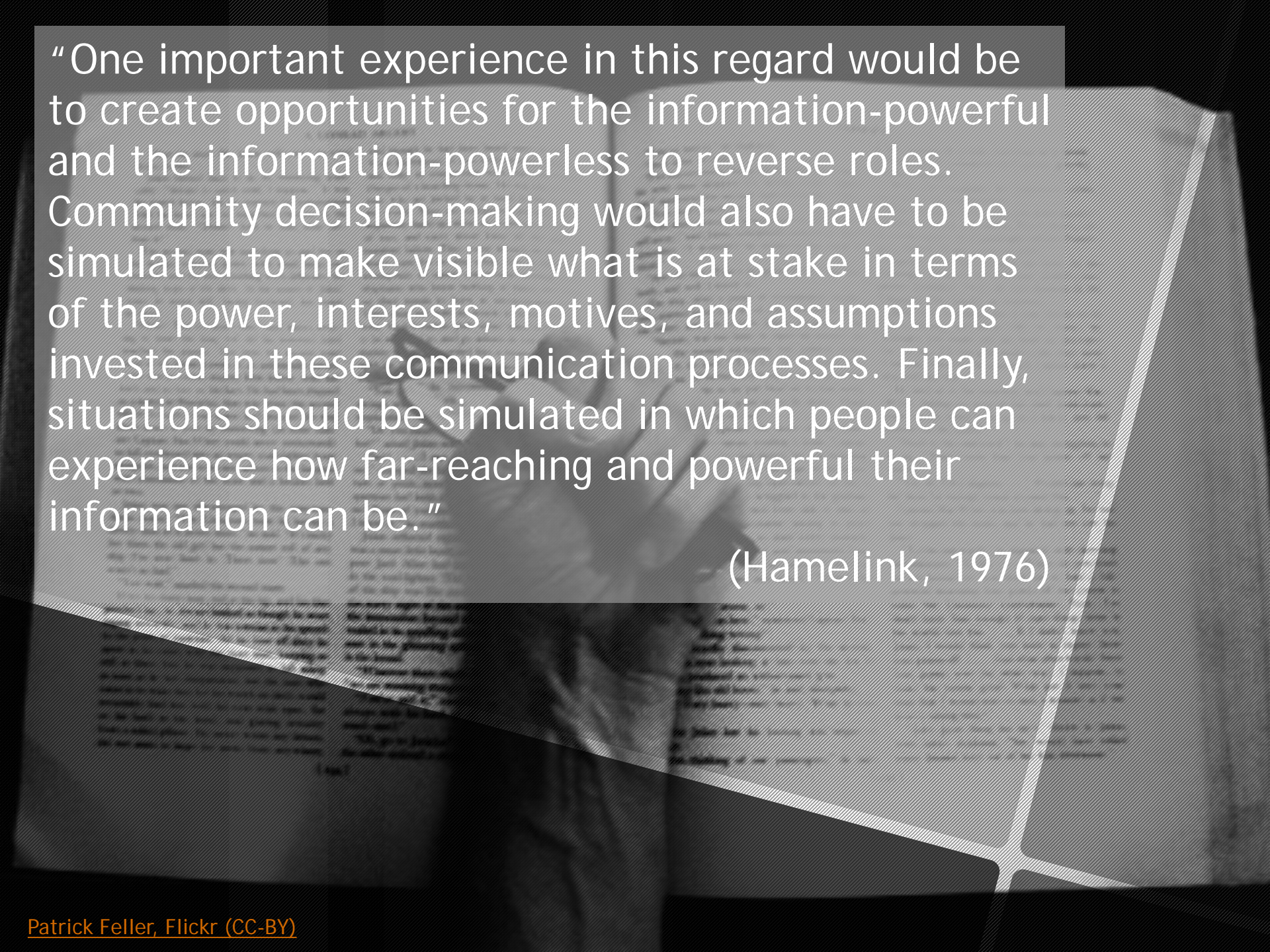
Acknowledging that beliefs and actions are influenced by heuristics, emotions and sociopolitical factors, and that non-  
'traditional' sources of information can be just as (or more) valid in certain contexts than traditional authorities, enables us to view the role of information literacy (in theory and practice) in a different light.





The findings may help practitioners to understand what general needs young people may have and how they might perceive things differently to how we might expect them to. We can understand how to build IL instruction in context and use this method as a tool for building it *with* our learners.





"One important experience in this regard would be to create opportunities for the information-powerful and the information-powerless to reverse roles. Community decision-making would also have to be simulated to make visible what is at stake in terms of the power, interests, motives, and assumptions invested in these communication processes. Finally, situations should be simulated in which people can experience how far-reaching and powerful their information can be."

(Hamelink, 1976)



# Pedagogy of hope

I do believe that teachers and other cultural workers have an obligation to plant seeds of hope.

It is not a matter of sloppy utopianism to believe that it is important for future generations to look back on the work we are doing as educators and to say that in our time we recognized the moral and political significance of deepening and expanding the possibilities for improving the quality of human life.

Giroux (1994, p.171)



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