

Co-constructing MIL in Public Senior High Schools: Harnessing the Potential of Participatory and Self-Reflexive Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide in-depth accounts of how select teachers of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in public senior high schools engaged in a self-reflexive and participatory process of inquiry into their views, practices, and experiences in teaching MIL. Qualitative data were derived and analyzed from the series of focus group workshops with seven MIL teachers, which provided a springboard for meaningful dialogue that co-constructed their perceptions of MIL education, the institutional challenges, and the ways to address these issues. The findings illustrate the potential of participatory research in revealing their inherent knowledge, sentiments, and attitudes towards MIL and in addressing the issues that confront their MIL education setting. The paper further argues that collaborative inquiry unlocks opportunities in putting forward short- and long-term measures for enhancing the MIL in schools, such as in the post-pandemic education context. Implications for harnessing the participatory approach towards digital inclusion in MIL education are also discussed.

Keywords: *media and information literacy, self-reflexive inquiry, participatory, public senior high school*

Introduction

Since the implementation of the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) curriculum in 2016, local MIL educators and advocates have raised the need to examine the status of MIL education in the country. On the grassroots level, research remains scant regarding the implementation of MIL education in both formal and informal contexts. Mainly due to its infancy, a comprehensive study on MIL and its pedagogical application in the K-12 education system has yet to emerge. While local research (Bautista, 2019) has surfaced the structural challenges of the practices of selected MIL teachers in various senior high schools, a more in-depth account of their experiences and perceptions is required to understand how teachers navigate the curriculum and how they take part in harnessing its potential amidst the rise of misleading narratives, historical revisionism, and disinformation that drive our citizens' democratic exercise.

Several scholars sought to establish a strong connection between participatory research with media literacy and its pedagogical application. According to Machin-Mastromatteo and Tarango (2019), action research can be "instrumental for improving or enhancing the ML conditions of a given sector or group through a systematic methodological design that considers the active

participation, engagement, reflection, and revision of practices by all its members.” Their view of participatory action research conducted for media literacy espouses the five-stage cycle that consists of the following: (1) Diagnostic or Analysis, which is to determine problems and participants’ situations; (2) Planning, which is to design a strategy for action to address the issues arising from the diagnosis; (3) Action or Intervention, which is to implement actions, strategies, and interventions, results of which are measured through certain instruments and methods; (4) Observation, which is done alongside the implementation of strategies, to foster reflections and systematically examine their practices; (5) Evaluation and Reflection, which is to gather feedback, draw out best practices, and formulate assessment of the activities about the purpose of the research cycle (Machin-Mastromatteo & Tarango, 2019).

In the same vein, local scholars use participatory research methods that highlight self-reflexive and emancipatory approaches to social research. One example of this model is the Socially Shared Inquiry (SSI) formulated by Alfonso (2001). This locally developed participatory communication framework, however, has not yet been fully used in previous studies in education contexts. One aspect that makes SSI unique from other participatory models is that it emphasizes the use of the term “poieta” construction, which refers to an individual’s interpretations, perceptions, and definitions of reality, a certain phenomenon, or problem situations. For instance, Usman-Laput (2005) made use of poieta in highlighting self-reflexivity in co-authoring realities among divergent and co-existing cultures as they construct their own stories of war among Muslim survivors in Sulu, Philippines.

Ultimately, the SSI presents itself differently from other participatory research approaches, such that SSI does not focus on delivering the actions derived from intellectual activity, but it would “solely provide the ability to make a plan for concrete steps” (Alfonso, 2001, p. 9). Hence, its main purpose is to foster and ‘institutionalize’ the research capabilities of the community conducting the research. In this sense, the SSI offers a way to fulfill the promise of “community enablement” through research among communities across various sectors in need of support for generating knowledge aimed at resolving their problem situations.

One of the most common approaches in exploring and addressing the problem situations experienced in formal education settings is through participatory action research (PAR). PAR, which is also commonly known as Action Research (AR), has been useful in developing solutions and improving the situation of a certain community. PAR is considered to have a powerful influence in transforming education and instruction practices (Machin-Mastromatteo et al., 2013). In this type of inquiry, knowledge is produced through a community-based approach where “participants play a major part in all of the stages of the research instead of being subjects of the research” (Sokhanvar & Salehi, 2018, p.24).

The strong relationship of a participatory research approach with media and information literacy is seen “as a new hope for research and practice” (Machin-Mastromatteo and Tarango, 2019, p.4) with its emancipatory goals in line with improving problem situations such as in developing MIL competencies and MIL teaching. This participatory and qualitative approach resides in the researcher’s procedures to study the attitudes, habits, practices, and views of the participants in line with “achieving a state of improvement through their reflection and active engagement” ((Machin-Mastromatteo and Tarango, 2019).

In relation to PAR, Alfonso’s SSI (2001) approach views the members of the community themselves as both the doers and subjects of inquiry. What makes it different from PAR, however,

is that SSI aims to “institutionalize the know-how for dealing long-term with any DPs” (Alfonso, 2001, p. 10) or ‘disabling perplexities’ experienced by the community members. In other words, SSI’s main goal of research is for its subject community members to acquire the “capability to know how to do their research” (p. 10) to improve their conditions and address different issues and challenges in their community. Thus, community enablement is achieved when the members learn to embrace an iterative process of inquiry (Kincheloe, 2003).

Central to this emancipatory notion of research is the democratic and critical approach to inquiry, inspired by notable scholars like Paolo Freire who assumed that people in the subject community are engaged as co-investigators as they probe their ways of thinking, perceptions, and critical reflections. Teachers as researchers engage in the process of inquiry which is also a pedagogical process, according to Kincheloe (2003). While having the opportunity to discern the outside forces that continue to determine their situations and to construct knowledge from what they experience, teachers as researchers, as Kincheloe (2003) puts it, become more aware of their capabilities to offer research-based contributions to education as they come to “realize that they have access to understandings that go far beyond what the expert researchers have produced” (p. 18). Moreover, an emancipatory and self-reflexive approach—the fundamental element embodied within Socially Shared Inquiry—enables the teacher-researcher to discern the consciousness of their fellow teachers, students, and administrators as well as the underlying socio-historical contexts in which the subject community and stakeholders operate (Kincheloe, 2003).

Thus, this study took off from what Machin-Mastromatteo and Tarango (2019) conceptualized toward exploring the strong connection of participatory research approaches with MIL education. As such, this paper intends to describe the process of socially shared inquiry (SSI) with select public SHS MIL teachers regarding the conduct of MIL in the formal education setting. To examine the participatory process that unlocked the teachers’ reflections, views, and experiences of MIL and its curriculum, this paper highlights the need for meaningful dialogue where teachers articulate their understanding of MIL to co-construct knowledge on addressing the problems that confront the MIL education in public senior high schools.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design primarily employed in the study on the perceptions of MIL teachers in public senior high schools (Garcia, 2022). The qualitative data in this paper were obtained from observation, field notes, and transcript of the series of focus group workshops with seven MIL teachers conducted in February 2020. The teachers participated voluntarily and were informed about the research and its purpose regarding the implementation of the MIL curriculum in public senior high schools. They were chosen based on criteria set for teachers who a) have taught MIL in public senior high school; b) have experienced several issues and challenges arising from their practices and strategies of coming to terms with the concept of MIL; (c) have felt the urgency to address these issues and challenges through research; (d) have seen the potential of research for their professional development and improvement of education and instruction practices; (e) are willing to share experiences as MIL teachers.

The sampling scheme aimed to capture a range of situations, attributes, and qualities of MIL teachers, including but not limited to a) those who received formal education and/or have prior

professional experience in media and communication; b) those who were hired to teach MIL on the criteria stated in the CHED-DepEd MIL Curriculum; those who are teaching other subjects aside from MIL within an academic term; c) those who teach MIL only for each academic term; d) those who had taught other subjects before teaching MIL. However, as the study scope only covered teachers residing within two selected municipalities, the sampling was able to include MIL teachers who did not receive prior education on media and communication.

The workshop entailed a series of participatory activities that engaged teachers in collaborative processing and analysis of information, views, perceptions, issues, and challenges. The topics of the three-day workshop activities were as follows: Knowing Our MIL Community; Mind-mapping the MIL Realities; Creating an Image of a Media and Information Literate Citizen; Sharing of Best Practices in MIL; Exploring the Challenges and Issues in MIL; and Developing the MIL Action Plan/Recommendations

Towards the end of each activity, the teachers worked together in categorizing and thematizing the data each one wrote on meta cards. They identified and clustered overlapping and recurrent ideas, came up with themes and categories, and showed relationships among key themes such as by drawing lines and arrows among meta cards and clusters of meta cards. Their perceptions, realities, and experiences with MIL were brought to the fore as they discussed their ideas and justifications for clustering the data and coming up with such themes. To this end, the teachers were given the platform to articulate their perplexing realities through activities that centered on free-wheeling and interactive exchange of ideas.

The guiding principles for the ethical conduct of this study recognize the active construction of data (poietia), in which case the MIL teachers developed consensus among themselves to establish what they consider as 'facts.' The self-reflexive nature of SSI took into account their relevant experiences and observations as evidence of their mutually accepted and authenticated perceptions about MIL and MIL teaching. To this end, they were consistently assured of the confidentiality of their personal information including the name of SHS. Code names were used in this paper to disguise their identity. While the purposes and objectives were made explicit in the invitation letter sent to the principal and teachers, the teachers were reminded of the purposes of conducting this study and its possible implications in the MIL implementation in public SHS. During the briefing, they were informed that they may opt to withdraw their participation in the study at any time for whatever reason.

The activities in the focus group workshop were audio-recorded upon obtaining informed consent from the teachers. These recordings were transcribed verbatim for coding and thematic analysis. Preliminary results under themes and categories were presented, discussed, and validated through consensus among the teachers. Analyses were finalized with the incorporation of their clarifications, descriptions, and inputs throughout the workshop. In this paper, the frame of analysis was anchored on the interrelated phases of conducting the SSI in the context of MIL education. The analysis focused on describing the process of co-constructing MIL based on their shared experiences and realities as teachers of MIL in their respective SHS.

Findings and Discussion

The MIL Teachers

The group involved seven SHS teachers from public schools. The teachers have different backgrounds and profiles in terms of their involvement in MIL. Their experience from their designation in MIL also varies. This section characterizes the teachers based on the sharing of their background about MIL in their respective SHS settings. One important finding is that the exchanges during the getting-to-know part of the workshop not only revealed their teaching backgrounds but also highlighted their sentiments and attitudes towards teaching MIL.

Carmen, in her late 20's, has been teaching at SHS for almost two years. As a Science major, she started teaching in the Science Department before she was transferred to the SHS. The first subject she handled in SHS was Empowerment Technology. She said that their school head saw in her the potential to handle the subject of MIL due to her teaching stint with the Empowerment Technology course. Like many others, her designation to MIL teaching came as a directive from their school principal. At the time of the focus group workshop, she was in her first semester of teaching MIL. With her recent teaching background with Empowerment Technology, she related her recent experiences with her school's ICT project tie-up with a tech company. While she claimed that she is a Science major, she expressed her developing interest in MIL, particularly in the Internet of Things, which is one of the topics discussed under the evolution of traditional to new media. She felt the need to know more about the concept and how to deliver it in her class. This appears to be one of the concerns as she pointed out that there is a high sense of resemblance between MIL and Emp Tech.

As a neophyte MIL teacher, she found the teaching guide (TG) helpful as it provides tips and suggested activities. Calm and reserved Carmen said, however, that for her class, the said TG provided by DepEd needed recalibration to approximate the learning environment and learners' context. She maintained:

'yong lang din po sa ibang activities, hindi siya pang-public school. ...may mga articles po na kailangan mag-access sa internet. And mayroon po silang MIL Portal na hindi po pwede naming gamitin...dahil po kami, wala po kaming internet connection sa classroom, at tsaka hindi po pwedeng 'yong mga bata, wala po silang pagprovide-in din ng sarili nilang internet, hindi po namin siya ginagawa. [some of the activities cannot be done in public school. There are articles that can only be accessed through the Internet, but our school does not have Internet connectivity. Students also don't have their own Internet access when in school, so we just skipped those activities.]

Her concern for the students was manifested when she expressed her worries about a growing number of students becoming addicted to computer games. She shared with the group that she was part of a team that developed a position paper about the students' addiction, exploring the policies that could be implemented in the local community to address these issues. She believed that too much exposure to such entertainment media as mobile games and YouTube has consequences on students' mental health.

She seemed quite timid during the exchanges about some of the topics tackled in the workshop but eventually became vocal in matters that most interest her, especially in her advocacy for keeping the students away from the dangers of computer addiction. With much enthusiasm, she narrated her experience with a parent who had recently found out about her son constantly skipping classes to spend his whole day at the computer shop. Being a social media user, Carmen shared that her recent Facebook engagement at the time of the workshop involved her posting a photo of her friends from her first year of teaching. She recalled that she captioned the photo with words expressing how much she had been missing her friends and colleagues from her early days as a teacher.

Vic, in his late 40's, began his teaching profession under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Department. He explained that he was only designated to teach MIL due to a shortage of teachers who were "more qualified to teach" the subject. Another reason why he was given the load was that their school admin perceived MIL to be related to his knowledge area which is ICT.

Despite having taught MIL for two semesters, he maintained that teaching MIL is not for him. Vocal and emphatic, Vic was convinced about his 'mismatch' and that MIL belongs to the domain of social sciences: "...parang alam ko na e at sinabi ko sa sarili ko hindi ako para dyan. Kasi nakikita ko na yung parang social science nga sya e" [I feel like I know it [MIL] but I told myself I am not fit for this course. Because I see that it is similar to social science.] While he thought he could teach the technical aspects of MIL (referring to the use of digital technologies and procedural and technology-based lessons on video-making, photography, graphics, and image-editing), he maintained that MIL and its relevant socio-civic components would be effectively delivered by teachers coming from the Social Studies Department.

He is aware that political and social issues are being discussed in the rise of Internet and social media use where photo manipulation for various propaganda, as well as new and old tricks for cyber hacking, have been prevalent, but he felt his lack of confidence in being able to deliver the course effectively given his limited knowledge. He also stood firm with his notion that the values being taught in GMRC are just as important nowadays as the values that one should uphold when using the Internet and social media. Thus, he was expressive about pushing the administration to consider providing more attention and support to MIL, adding that budget allocation should prioritize equipping teachers with MIL competencies that do not mainly revolve around technological and digital adeptness such as skills in Photoshop, Microsoft, etc.

With his rich teaching experience in ICT, Vic was forward-looking at how lucky the students were because of this new subject. He recalled this kind of literacy never existed during their time, but he was hopeful that this welcome development should address the problems with today's media and information content and platforms. As an active social media user, he candidly shared his recent Facebook post: a photo of him with his wife, as his way of showing the lovers in them amidst the Valentine's hype on social media during the time of the focus group workshop.

Crisanto, in his late 50's, assumed the school head position in a SHS in 2019. As a Science Major, he considered it a huge challenge to teach MIL as he thought he came "back to zero" in terms of learning how to teach a new subject that is not within his area of teaching expertise. He was able to teach MIL for one semester because, during that time, their school was experiencing a shortage of teachers.

As a school administrator, he has conducted several action research projects in the past, but

due to the increasing workload, he could not find time to continue research. His background in action research, coupled with the difficulties he experienced while teaching MIL, convinced him to participate in this action research for MIL. He said that what convinced him to attend was the opportunity to be part of the research on a topic that he found truly and personally relevant--the increasing exposure of the youth to social media and his perceived lack of adeptness in keeping up with the ever-changing media environment. That is why he also mentioned that attending workshops like this would be a platform for him to enhance his knowledge about MIL.

He also expressed his interest in the research findings from this focus group workshop and how this may create an impact on the current situation concerning MIL in schools and the community in general. As a Facebook user, he admitted that he was into positive news and “good vibes only” content. According to him, he maximized his use of social media to share practical and useful information with his constituents and co-teachers who are also on social media. Giving an example of good news, he shared that he recently posted about a DepEd memo on the release of monetary incentives for public school teachers.

As a digital migrant, he found it challenging to teach through media. He admitted he was not technically adept, acknowledging that he used to lack skills in evaluating information from browsing the Internet where he only selected the website entries that first appeared on his browser. Crisanto recounted:

So nagturo ako ng MIL, eh MIL, so basa, basa, basa. walang books din ang available, so nakaasa lang ako sa internet. So browse browse ako ay eto pala ang social media, ay ito pala yung posting... So parang ako'y natuto at the same time natuto ako. Eh magandang experience. First week second week mahirap talaga. Disaster ang pakiramdam ko. Nung naka one month na ko, hinahanap hanap ko so nawili tuloy ako mag search ngayon.” [So I handled MIL, then I had to read a lot. We were not given textbooks so I relied on the Internet. From browsing, I learned a lot from social media, posting, etc. It's a worthwhile experience. During the first few weeks it felt like a disaster, but eventually, I've become engrossed in searching the Internet.]

While teaching through media already poses a huge problem for him, Crisanto believed that teaching about media constitutes a different challenge, as he admitted his lack of knowledge about the complex nature of the changing media and information landscape in contemporary society.

In addition, he was firm that this MIL is not only for the students in SHS. According to him, people from across all generations have been already exposed to various kinds of media and he felt that the MIL was belatedly introduced in schools. He added that the out-of-school youths also have access to media platforms and that they are more likely to spend more hours using their gadgets and other devices. He wittingly shared his experience with his 6-year-old son who, unbeknown to him, incidentally purchased on his own using a famous mobile shopping app. To his surprise, a courier came to his house with a toy package via cash-on-delivery.

Noli, in his late 30's, is one of the pioneer teachers of MIL in his public SHS. He has been teaching MIL since its first launch in their school. As a Science major, he used to handle Science subjects before teaching MIL. Having taught MIL for three consecutive years, he shared that he

was among those who were assigned to teach MIL due to a lack of faculty who were fit to teach the course.

During the workshop, he was enthusiastic to share his experiences since his first teaching stint in MIL three years ago. He enjoyed narrating his encounters with various social media content that he found relatable for his classes. I noticed that his years of experience in teaching MIL allowed him to actively participate in the discussions by sharing many stories and insights from his classes, including his mentions of examples from popular content such as viral videos, influencer/challenger vlogs, and some trending Tulfo episodes.

His awareness of the trends related to digital wellness was also manifested. He recounted some rising issues of identity theft among teachers, the popularity of stock trading, several types of investment scams done online, and some other tech trends. He showed that with his current knowledge of digital media platforms, one must be skeptical about making transactions online. Tech-savvy Noli shared his experience in showing an example of monitoring and observing activities online when he asked his students to use his laptop installed with screen recording software.

Manifesting his use of social media for sharing news and information, Noli said that during the time of the workshop, he posted a recently published article about the NCOV (Novel coronavirus), updating us in the group how it was fast spreading worldwide. For him, being tech-savvy is not enough as he believed there are a lot of MIL components that require in-depth knowledge--an aspect where he felt it was taxing to prepare and teach about something he did not learn from his pre-service and in-service teacher education and training.

Lester, in his 30's, started teaching MIL when he was still employed in a private SHS in Laguna. When he transferred to public SHS, MIL was among the subjects assigned to him. Being the only one among the group who came from the English Department, he said that his background as a writer and as an English major allowed him to understand several concepts of MIL. Despite this, one source of his discomfort and uncertainty in teaching MIL is that he thought he was not "techie enough to give justice" to teaching the digital and technological know-how of MIL.

Lester pointed out: *"...hindi po kasi ako techie talaga, so yun yung idea ko parang ang nakikita ko pong ideal teacher dito is yung techie at the same time magaling sa English, Social Science, exposed sa media."* [I am not really a techie person, so for me the ideal teacher to handle MIL is someone who is knowledgeable on the use of technology, and at the same time, well versed in English, Social Science, and has gained adequate experience with and exposure to media.]

His sentiment appears to be somehow similar to Vic's, but the other way around: Lester is convinced with his adeptness at the conceptual aspects of MIL but not at those technical aspects required in creating media content such as infomercials, films, posters, and the likes. He shared that he would rely on his co-teachers handling Empowerment Technology who are more adept at techniques in media production when evaluating the outputs of his students. He also appeared to be very opinionated, especially during the discussions about media-related processes, which can be attributed to his working knowledge and educational background in Journalism and Mass Communications from his pre-service years.

Lester revealed that unlike most of his colleagues and the members of the group, he did not use Facebook. He emphasized this during the introduction where I asked them about a particular information or message they recently shared or created in any of the existing media platforms. He shared that as a blog writer, he spent most of his virtual time with his community blog where

he contributed and published online articles. I found out about his blog when I tried to Google his name. The chief editor of a community blog, he wrote several opinion and feature articles about various topics such as education, politics, mental health, and spirituality, among others. One could easily tell through his writings and philosophical musings how articulate, eloquent, and critical he is in expressing his views about topics he finds interesting. With his background as an English major and relevant experience in Journalism, radio, and TV broadcasting, he was actively sharing his views about MIL and felt confident about being able to share his knowledge on concepts and conventions about media and information.

Jeff, in his late 20's, used to be a Junior High School teacher in the Social Studies Department. He was recently transferred to SHS due to a shortage of teachers. When he was assigned to SHS, it was also his first semester to teach MIL. Aside from MIL, he was also teaching Philippine Politics and Governance subject. As a Social Studies major, he claimed that he instantly saw the importance of MIL in contemporary society. This was his reaction when he first encountered the MIL curriculum.

He declared that he has been actively engaged in social media for almost a decade of his life. He felt very confident in teaching MIL, and he attributed this to his rich experience with social media. He shared: *"I think po ang bagay kung bakit po feeling ko kumportable ako sa MIL ay dahil 10 years na ko sa Facebook, and right now malaking part ng araw ko ay nasa social media ako..." [I think the reason why I feel comfortable with MIL is the fact that I have been using Facebook for 10 years. Each day I spend long hours on social media.]*

Driven by his youth and perceptiveness on social issues and current affairs, Jeff manifested that his use of social media extends his role beyond the walls of the classroom. He believed it is through social media that he could best offer his students the information and relevant news to keep them socially aware.

As an active social media user and social studies teacher, he was vocal in expressing his views on the significance of relating the concepts of MIL to the social realities of his students. This way, he believed students may best see the value of MIL in their lives. Having such a point of view highlights his learner-centered approach to teaching MIL. In addition, Jeff felt the ever-increasing relevance of MIL to the youth. The students' early exposure to media led them to develop their habits and practices in engaging with various media and information platforms. With this outlook, he stood firm that MIL concepts should also be taught at lower grade levels. Aside from being able to relate to his students through Facebook, Jeff mentioned his part in spreading "good vibes" by joining several netizens who created memes of the viral photo concerning the issue of NCOV later known as Corona Virus Disease (COVID).

Myla, in her late 30s, is an SHS teacher who handles Contemporary Philippine Arts from the Regions and Empowerment Technology courses. She and Jeff worked in the same school. Their school had sent both of them to the workshop since Myla was part of the roster of teachers to be assigned to handle MIL in their school. During the discussions, she was able to relate to the group with her experiences and insights in teaching EmpTech, a course that is perceived to be highly related to and a prerequisite of MIL in SHS.

Myla's teaching background and experiences appeared similar to the experiences shared by the rest of the group. She recounted her familiarity with teaching through media and remarked: *"Kami po kasi 'di ba, nagdi-daily lesson plan. From there ayun, preparing the lesson for the day then research using the internet, para ma-support ang lesson, ang topic. So Google, Youtube, and*

many more” [We prepare our lessons and make use of the Internet to research for our materials to support the lesson and topics, so we rely on Youtube, Google, among others].

Apart from sharing about her social media post regarding UPLB Feb Fair, an upcoming public event in her community, Myla told the group that her recent posts on Facebook included an old Jesuit motto, “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam” (for the greater glory of God)--a takeaway from her Contemporary Phil Arts subject that she said she wanted her students to remember from their class on that day. Despite having minimal grasp of the MIL curriculum, she candidly discussed her insights for demanding greater administrative support from DepEd and the national government for MIL. A mother, wife, and literacy advocate, she expressly viewed MIL as a human right, noting that the various problems in terms of structure, similar to her experience in teaching Emp Tech, have hindered the advancement of MIL in the country.

Teachers’ Self-Reflexivity

The sharing of background and experiences in teaching MIL sheds light on the varying profiles of teachers in such contexts where MIL has been operationalized. The group was composed of teachers who came from various teaching areas such as Science, English, ICT, and Social Studies. In terms of duration of teaching MIL, the group greatly varies, ranging from pioneers: those who started teaching since MIL has been offered in their school; to neophytes: those who were just given MIL teaching load at the time of data gathering. They also confirmed having attended no MIL-related seminars and training since their first MIL assignment. Meanwhile, most of them shared they barely had any MIL-related educational background from their four-year degree courses before teaching.

Furthermore, the discussions pointed out teachers’ practices in teaching through media. This was shown in their constant reliance on media as they fulfilled their roles as MIL teachers, such that each lesson of MIL was to be prepared with the use of media and information that they had access to. The teachers shared that they usually relied on the Internet for online searching of information, related articles, examples, and media clips as visual aids and materials for their MIL lessons. The exchanges thus provided a glimpse of their media realities: their familiarity with media and information platforms, their media use, habits, and preferences, and their ways of self-learning about media.

Their activities on the Internet reflected their own personal and daily life experiences with media and information. The preceding discussion indicates a group of MIL teachers who have varying degrees and types of media usage, practices, interests, and preferences. This finding also established their differing profiles and backgrounds as users and creators of media and information, surfacing their preferences in the use of social media. Some also shared how frequently they engaged with media and information sources and platforms, suggesting that the group members have varying levels, from light to heavy media use and exposure.

Amidst the differences in experiences with media and practices of teaching MIL, another major commonality was constructed and derived from their sharing of views and sentiments: It appeared that teachers gain richer experiences with media as they continuously develop their knowledge in MIL through learning and teaching MIL. The teachers attested to the notion that as they were compelled to do online research for continuously updating their lessons, they recognized the need to always be in the know of what is latest and most relevant to the interests

of their students. Thus, having been compelled to self-study the MIL concepts, their self-learning process is also a factor that contributed to their growth both as MIL teachers and media users.

The discussions hence pointed to what Buckingham (2009) reminds us about distinguishing the two dimensions: teaching through media vs. teaching about media. While they recognized that teaching through media has been a huge part of their teaching experience given their heavy reliance on digital media for their instructional materials, teaching about media was distinguished as an uncommon experience among the teachers. What became more pronounced were the teachers' varying attitudes toward teaching a subject that is explicitly about media and its critical and creative aspects (Buckingham, 2009; Hobbs, 2016; Leaning, 2019). As suggested in this study, these attitudes can be attributed to having such strong feelings as being confident about MIL competence areas; feeling capable of teaching MIL concepts; having concerns about learners and their learning environment.

The sentiments shared by the teachers reflected their beliefs about themselves which in turn shaped their attitude towards having been assigned to handle this core subject. These views are drawn from such factors that connect them. These connections hence constructed a community with shared realities as teachers who are not only duty-bound to handle MIL but also concerned about learners, their education, and their own MIL competence and capabilities in teaching amidst uncertainties.

Unlocking Opportunities brought by SSI

The tools and techniques used in the focus group workshop series kept the discussion going as these were crucial in equalizing and expanding participation (Alfonso, 2001) among the group. The participatory method of focus group workshop allowed for surfacing various poietic constructions from teachers' perceptions, motivations, beliefs, and realities concerning MIL. The teachers were given the platform to articulate what seemed to them as perplexing realities, as the activities centered on free-wheeling and interactive exchange of ideas. Throughout these activities, it was not difficult to engage them as it appeared each of them never seemed to run out of ideas and experiences to share.

The workshop gave each one a chance to speak up and make their stories heard. However, given the limitations of time, the researcher's facilitation skills were put to the test. At times, when someone goes all-out and enthusiastic in sharing, it was not easy to figure out how to interrupt when all the other members seemed to be very interested in listening to the stories. There were times when some would engage in side conversations during someone's turn to speak. This was addressed by reiterating and highlighting key points raised by the speaker and then asking others (indirectly towards the ones who did side conversations) what they think of the points made if they feel the same, or what they could share based on their own similar experiences.

As a method of inquiry, the SSI concepts of Alfonso (2001) offer clear guidelines for implementing the inquiry with the subject community. Anchoring the procedures with interrelated phases has cleared the path for achieving the research goals, the researcher formulated the focus group workshop activities in line with the procedures, tools, and techniques for evoking the perceptions and cognitions of MIL teachers. It is worth noting that in comparison with FGDs that come in the usual Q&A format, the focus group workshop was able to harness a space where participants were given enough time to reflect on issues that matter to them before saying their

responses to the facilitator and their co-participants.

Sharing and Co-creating Visions

During the introduction at the first meeting, the research topic and objectives were presented very well and resonated with the teachers. While this appears as a limitation in which they were not able to actively be involved in formulating the design of this research, this departure from the participatory genuineness of this SSI was due to logistical and time constraints. Nevertheless, the moment when they began to understand why it is important to sit down with the rest of the group, contribute ideas, and express their points of view was already manifested in their ready acceptance of the research topic and their interest in talking about MIL, which in turn sets the foundation for co-constructing MIL.

The SSI and its participatory tools and techniques in eliciting and evoking perceptions crucially worked to facilitate the course of communication among the MIL teachers on two levels: 1) for co-creating knowledge about perplexing realities in MIL as a concept and as a core subject; and 2) for establishing consensus on practical solutions aimed at addressing their issues and challenges.

The prompts in each of the activities in the workshop served as a launchpad for generating ideas and insights about MIL, which were represented by meta cards. Presumably, the tools also allowed them to use enough time to organize their thoughts as they processed their reflections on their situations. Further, the interactive process of collective synthesis that took place in each activity allowed the MIL teachers to codify and thematize their views from their shared beliefs while recognizing diverse voices.

The participatory analysis, hence, allowed for multiple perspectives to come out, be heard, and validated. The teachers' motivations to actively express their take on various topics and issues were facilitated and sustained through free-flowing exchanges and talkbacks. Through this framework, what has emerged was a group of teachers who came from different backgrounds, schools, and varying contexts, and who just met each other for the first time, yet were able to arrive at similar views and unified stance in pursuit of improving the quality of MIL. Thus, the nuances brought about by spaces for self-reflection and collaborative processing of poietas among themselves have made focus group workshops a distinct method of inquiry as it lends itself to the self-reflexive and participatory ideals of SSI.

In facilitating the SSI framework with MIL teachers, the Interrelationships between and among the SSI phases manifested throughout the workshop activities, in which articulations have surfaced from a recursive process of reflecting from and analyzing their realities. The MIL implementation in public Senior High Schools constitutes the general frame of this inquiry. The focus group workshop allowed for discursive exchanges that brought to the fore the MIL teachers' poietas - actively constructed data - that consist of both shared and diverse views, opinions, and perceptions about their MIL realities. These also represented their conceptualizations about media and information, which inform how they make sense of MIL as a concept and as a core subject.

Operational constructs were worked out into major themes on the issues and challenges in MIL, and are hereby recognized as their disabling perplexities. Throughout the process, consensus points were generated in which decisions were made and fully supported by MIL teachers; the

process was allowed to come into a full circle as teachers carried out resolutions which in turn demonstrated the ability of SSI to spark the much-anticipated changes in problem-situations of MIL teachers.

This further evinced authentication in which feedback and validation occurred to confirm and no longer question the decisions made during the last workshop activity. A separate follow-up session dedicated to validation was conducted for this purpose as well as for them to add further articulations of ideas that the researcher and participants might have failed to notice.

The institutionalizing phase involved transitioning from enabler-assisted research to internalization of the research where teachers subject the findings to their local knowledge of the existing protocols when presenting research output as recommendations to the DepEd officials and those at the top of the bureaucracy. Here they resolved to reckon with their political contexts or locations of power that underlie their current situations. To this end, the SSI was able to create the circumstances for community competence, in which the MIL teachers realized their capability to cope with problems and come up with solutions after their involvement in an outside-guided research process.

Emphasis is given to the interrelationship among the phases where points of consensus could be found: MIL relevance in society, interpretations of MIL, variations in MIL approaches and contexts, themes on issues and challenges, resolutions, and actionable next steps. In the process of collective and active construction of poietas about MIL and the teacher's realities, their reflections and analyses are crystallized into valuable knowledge that could inform the setting of the directions of the MIL curriculum in the context of our public education system.

SSI Towards Emancipation and Community Enablement

On the second day of the workshop, which focused on their thoughts about the curriculum and how they think it could be improved, Lester--curious as he was about what could happen should they decide to review the curriculum--expressed his reservations:

Pero mga doktor po kasi ang tumitingin noon eh. Alam niyo naman 'di ba, kapag sa DepEd, o kahit anong institutions, mga matataas na po ang hierarchy ng mga iyan. So kung le-level kami, parang ano yata, ewan ko, kung paano ang dating sa kanila...Na baka kasi biglang, "Sino ba 'tong mga nagsu-suggest na ito, teachers lang naman 'tong mga 'to? [But the ones who review the curriculum are those who earned PhD. As you know, in DepEd or any other institution, those at the top of the hierarchy are the ones who rule and make decisions. So if we, teachers, who are not at the same level as they are, undertake this review, I'm not sure how they would react. They might end up questioning our credibility, saying we're merely part of the teaching staff.]

He went on explaining about that kind of mentality, which he held based on his personal experience:

"Papakinggan ba tayo ng nasa taas? Eh sila nga 'yung pinanggalingan nung CG na iyan. Or kahit teachers guide na iyan o ano man" [Would those at the policy

level recognize our sentiments if they were the ones who drafted the CG and teacher's guide in the first place?]

At this point, Myla and Jeff took their stand, believing that a bottom-up approach may bring better outcomes. Jeff shared his thoughts about recognizing the voices from the field. He said as a rejoinder:

Tsaka 'di ba, parang ang mga CG natin ay, ang sabi nga nung, mayroon tayong mga ibang think tanks, na ang sabi nga, 'yung curriculum kasi natin ay parang nakabase or naka-lifted sa foreign na education. Kaya I think, mas valid ito, kasi tayo 'yung galing sa field kaya mas maco-contextualized natin 'yung curriculum, kung sakali' [I think our review of CG is more valid because this comes from our experiences in the field and so, if ever we succeed, we could really contextualize the CG. This could bridge the gap to the previous issues that the CGs are developed by "think tanks" who are outsiders and that the CGs are lifted from foreign educational contexts.]

In addition, Myla highlighted the importance of an insider view in writing or developing the CG, where those who have the experience in the field could think about the outcome of the curriculum they developed. She also pointed out the MIL teachers' valuable contribution in voicing out sentiments to challenge the curriculum: *"Unless i-challenge 'yung CG, hindi siya mare-revised. So I think, napakaganda ng ganitong mga pag-aaral at pagsubok ng pagbabago."* [Unless we challenge the CG, it won't get the revision it needs.]

It can be observed that Lester was convinced when his colleagues raised the notion of approaching the review of CG in a bottom-top manner. In the first place, he only welcomed the idea of researching their own experiences, so they could reflect on those practices to improve their instruction. But it was only until the previous exchanges that he accepted the idea that this inquiry could reach a point of recommending inputs for curriculum review. This scenario relates to SSI's notion of consensus after contention. What transpired then was a picture of addressing conflicts that transitioned into 'establishing a sense of unrefutability and viability' because of recognizing and reflecting from multiple views (Alfonso, 2001).

Ultimately, this snapshot of exchanges of views about their MIL realities has no less showcased the potential of SSI for emancipation. This revealed the underlying contradictions and the internalized inequitable structure that shape the perceptions of teachers on their disposition as MIL teachers and their relationship with their 'higher-ups' in their current political context. Through this exchange, Lester, who had previously weighed up on his perceived inferiority of their ranks, was able to reflect on his position which transitioned to a different point of view--one that is authenticated by his co-teachers who are actively constructing an empowered voice wanting to be heard--one that could genuinely represent their realities from the field.

Further, power is decentralized by way of establishing an equal footing in asserting their decision-making authority for proposing resolutions to their lived problems and perplexing realities. One key resolution that they came up with focused on capacitating them through MIL training; thus, enhancing their competence appeared to be a vital part of their consciousness as educators. This aspiration for enhancement and professional development also manifested as

they charted their territory for co-creating knowledge about their community as MIL teachers in public SHS.

Increasing consciousness was evinced, as teachers gained an opportunity to discern outside forces that determine their situations in MIL teaching contexts. This supports the conceptions of teachers-as-researchers, as this instance tells us about how far the teachers could realize their capabilities to offer a research-based contribution to education, based on understandings that could even fare way better than those possessed by so-called 'experts' (Kincheloe, 2003). In this light, SSI, similar to participatory action research projects, remains responsive to the arising circumstances and adaptive to change. This is achieved while adhering to the built-in process of inter-subjectivity (Ngwenya, 2017), where the teachers were able to establish a means for constant interaction to confirm, question, and challenge the observations, reflections, and experiences brought out during the workshop sessions and follow-up queries. Further, what transpired can be attributed to the success of this SSI are the turning points in which the teachers allowed themselves to transition from one point to another, embodying "a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2008).

Other Practical Points to Consider

Overall, the co-constructed meanings and conceptualizations about MIL could inform the necessary revisions and development of the current MIL implementation. The findings could provide useful guidelines, points for evaluation, and grassroots knowledge for curriculum and policy administrators as well as course coordinators and authors of textbooks and educational materials on what's happening in the field where opportunities for MIL are yet to be explored.

Notably, what transpired in this research is the collaborative inquiry that has opened up possibilities for both short-term and long-term dealing with community problems: on the one hand, the formulations of proposed action points and on the other, the realization of their capability to contribute research-based knowledge for the betterment of MIL situation in public schools. Disseminating the findings of the study would entail acquiring approval from the school principals. Upon endorsement, the report shall be forwarded to the SHS coordinator of the respective school districts and divisions. As shared by the teachers, the report may undergo review and confirmation by the SHS coordinator, and from there, preliminary meetings may be conducted to explore areas for coordination in pursuit of addressing the urgent matters discussed, most especially about curriculum and instruction.

Through this SSI, the teachers were urged to harness the benefits of conducting research into their realities, whether inside or outside their classrooms, to find solutions to improve their situation. This shows one way of advocating for research which is to make people realize that the ones who are experiencing the problem are in the best position to make decisions and solutions for themselves. For instance, as an experienced action researcher, Vic recommended using our focus group workshop findings for further action research such as surveys regarding MIL, especially for mapping the competencies of MIL teachers, identifying their training needs, and finding better and more effective strategies for achieving the goals of MIL. In this view, SSI further charts the directions for cultivating a culture of research among learning communities for dealing with their issues and challenges.

The focus group workshop design can be adopted as a model to conduct the collaborative inquiry among MIL teachers. Each activity prompt and exercise was designed to harness experiential learning on the iterative processes of analyses and reflections from the participants' realities, views, attitudes, and beliefs. Departures from this specific workshop module design may be considered, depending on various factors such as time, availability of key persons, group dynamics, group communication styles, objectives, and scope and limitation of the topic or subject of inquiry. Apart from this module, another important factor is the enabler/facilitator. Qualities such as social skills and experience with the community, motivation and commitment to research, ability to self-reflect, and knowledge of and sensibility to the pressing issues and concerns of the community are vital to be able to perform their function in the entire process. Most importantly, for the SSI to be fully achieved, the enabler/teacher-researcher must forge meaningful participation of the community members whose motivation to participate hinges on their concerns for improving the quality of learning.

Co-constructing MIL in Post-Pandemic Education Context

The drastic shift to online classes amidst the pandemic has required changes in the implementation and delivery of MIL in both public and private schools. Such changes may be of great interest among educators, which could hence explore the post-pandemic applicability and application of SSI. Due to the migration to online classes, each course curriculum has undergone review and revision to adapt to the reduced number of sessions in the school calendar. This revision hence may have articulated the most essential learning competencies (MELC) in the K-12 curriculum, which in the case of MIL, may have revealed the interpretations and visions that teachers conceived of MIL given the unprecedented circumstances. Applying SSI to what MIL and teachers went through during this interesting shift may further inform the curriculum revision to be operationalized when schools go back to face-to-face mode.

The post-pandemic teaching setup has created a new challenge, and thus a steep learning curve for teachers about their technological capabilities. Also, the shift to online classes has inevitably increased teachers' exposure to online media platforms. They were compelled to use and learn about these digital platforms while some are still having apprehensions and inadequate experience and familiarity. The schools adjusted their teaching activities and learning modalities, most of which have heavily relied on various online and digital technologies such as emails (e.g., Gmail, Outlook), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), video-conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams), and cloud-based learning management systems (e.g., Google Classroom, Edmodo, Canvas).

MIL teachers who lack the technical exposure and skills, as the findings suggest, are already challenged to deliver MIL in ways that correspond to the outputs-based media production class requirements. Yet the transition from face-to-face to online learning could pose a heightened difficulty for them, similar to what Bailey and Lee (2020) found in their post-pandemic educational research where teachers who have experience in online teaching anticipate less challenge compared to those who do not have prior experience in delivering classes online. In the same manner, the challenge to develop more interactive and learner-centered teaching strategies remains and is even more pronounced because of the reduced interaction in the online setup. This echoes the findings of Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2020) where the use of digital technologies

for more engaging and enjoyable class activities like game websites (e.g., quizziz.com) has posed a new challenge for teachers as they have yet to familiarize themselves with these new digital learning through educational online games.

An interesting point also underscores the fact that all teachers, with or without experience in handling MIL, have been all the more exposed to these platforms with the need to gather engaging and interactive teaching materials available from the Internet, such as video materials on Science experiments, video tutorials for solving Math problems, documentaries and films for teaching History and Social Studies--all in the hope of unloading some burden off their shoulders as they deal with uncharted territories of online teaching. Thus, we see the point of MIL transcending the boundaries of a single core subject, thereby reaffirming the need to integrate MIL as a mindset and as a framework for curricula to serve teachers and students from across all subjects and fields of study.

Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

The participatory, self-reflexive, and emancipatory framework of SSI crucially aimed to facilitate community enablement among MIL teachers. Through collective analyses and reflections, the teachers articulated various issues and challenges they experienced in MIL teaching. The participatory process that underlies the reflective analyses of shared realities in teaching MIL allowed for the co-construction of consensually agreed resolutions to address the perceived issues and challenges. It is through the interrelated phases of the SSI that the teachers realize their capability to contribute research-based knowledge and arrive at consensus points that lay the groundwork for the improvement of the quality of MIL in our public education contexts.

It further explicates the value of co-creation of knowledge on two levels: first, the community self-understanding illustrated by how MIL teachers transitioned from reflecting on their perplexing realities into discerning their capabilities for making necessary changes in their situation; second, their local practical knowledge that was surfaced and processed into resolutions toward improving the quality of MIL.

Communication here takes the form of social production of meaning marked by recursive, interactive, and discursive exchanges on the teachers' sense-making of media and information. Thus, with the various conceptualizations emerging from these exchanges, this study offers a conceptual view of how media theorizing and constructions are being operationalized and contextualized vis-a-vis ordinary local knowledge in these formal learning spaces, such as the MIL in public schools. Further, the self-reflexive, social constructionist and emancipatory underpinning of SSI allowed to surface the stories, sentiments, viewpoints, and voices that are often taken for granted and pushed to the margins of the prevailing structures that shape the socio-political context of the research situation. It proved the soundness of the SSI framework to facilitate people as they study themselves, tell and reflect stories about themselves, in ways that engage them as both doers and subjects of research.

This study also highlights the importance of examining the meaning-making of individuals involved in the movement toward improving our MIL, in which their perceptions, points of view, and perplexing realities are constantly shaping the discourses on the role of media in contemporary society. This is consistent with what Machin-Mastromatteo and Tarango (2019)

have conceptualized on the plausible connection of participatory and emancipatory research approaches with the MIL and its pedagogical application--a line of research seen as urgent for promoting inclusiveness of education. Likewise, the factors that are found to shape their attitudes towards MIL, hence, suggest a conceptual basis for building and assessing MIL teachers' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), a concept that has been found to have great influences on the overall effectiveness of delivering a course.

This research presented that the MIL teacher-researchers are to benefit the most from both the findings of the study and the actual conduct of the research process. Similar research could contribute to strengthening the Department of Education's Learning Action Cells (LAC), a nationwide school-based program that seeks to enhance teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and competencies in several pedagogical aspects such as curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The LAC functions to cultivate professional learning communities and serves as a supplement to the predominantly existing top-down processes of knowledge transfer, such as lecture workshops, teacher training, and short-term courses from external agencies. In the context of such policy, which also remains under-explored, co-design methods (Koh et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2019) are seen as crucial in promoting the bottom-up process of collaborative inquiry to solve challenges shared within the community.

From the perspectives of self-reflexivity and participation (Alfonso, 2001) and digital inclusion (Olphert, 2005), this study holds that as a multi-faceted concept, MIL is inherent in human lives. It puts forward an outlook that media education should not be separate from our social reality and that framing MIL education should be inclusive and should consider the contexts, realities, experiences, knowledge, and learning needs of MIL teachers and learners amidst the ever-changing media and communication landscape. Participating in how MIL education is designed and implemented is tantamount to promoting digital inclusion and upholding everyone's right to have access to information, right to cyber security and protection, and right to participation in the digital society.

Acknowledgement: *This paper is derived in part from a study published in LEARNING, MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY 02 Feb 2022 @Taylor & Francis, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17439884.2022.2035396>*

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