



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

# PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

**Christine M. Beer**

2007 Boston College, MEd (Curriculum & Instruction)  
2005 Boston College, BA (English)

“Critical Media Health Literacy in Burma/Myanmar:  
A Case Study of High School Students”

Tuesday, January, 14, 2013

9:00 AM

David Turpin Building (DTB), Room A136

## **Supervisory Committee:**

Dr. Deborah Begoray, Department of Curriculum and  
Instruction, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. James Nahachewsky, Department of Curriculum  
and Instruction, University of Victoria (Member)

Dr. Joan Wharf Higgins, School of Exercise Science,  
Physical and Health Education, University of  
Victoria (Outside Member)

## **External Examiner:**

Dr. Judy King, School of Rehabilitation Sciences,  
University of Ottawa

## **Chair of Oral Examination:**

Dr. Ulrike Stege, Department of Computer Science, UVic

## **Abstract**

Current health literacy research is reconceptualizing health literacy and social learning. Theorists are situating health literacy in the contexts of digital media and critical sociocultural theories (e.g., Wharf Higgins & Begoray, 2012), based on the proposition that literacy is a complex and layered human involvement in socio-political contexts (e.g., Gee, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Levin-Zamir, Lemish, & Gofin, 2011; Nahachewsky & Ward, 2007). Research with adolescents in various contexts around the world has indicated that an empowerment approach to literacy education is effective for health literacy interventions (King, 2007).

This study responds to the need to design and facilitate high school curriculum to empower adolescents to develop health literacy, and the study responds to the research participants' choice of mental health as the topic of an interdisciplinary curriculum. Situated in the traditions of qualitative case study research methods, and positioned to engage the online social media contexts in which adolescents participate, this study explored how Critical Media Health Literacy (Wharf Higgins & Begoray, 2012) is expressed by a particular group of Burmese adolescents.

The data reveal how the theoretical concept of Critical Media Health Literacy, when operationalized as a unit of analysis for the case study and a theoretical framework for the data collection methods of the case study, can be facilitated in a way that engages the research participants in specific skills' practice and in cognitive, emotional reflection on their own health and literacies capacities. Data collection methods involved face-to-face interviews, online social media blogs, web page designs, and face-to-face group discussions.

The analysis found optimism, anxiety, and taking action were major themes shaping the conditions for the adolescents' development of health literacy, showing

health literacy to be integral with media literacy and critical capacities, and indicating the concept of Critical Media Health Literacy has relevance for curriculum that engages adolescents who are situated in Burma/Myanmar to take action to improve the health of themselves and others in their social contexts.

The findings indicate that this population and the applicability of Critical Media Health Literacy for high school curriculum in this setting requires further exploration to understand why social determinants of health are perceived as inevitable, how social pressures related to health are negotiated, and how digital structures influence the criticality of literacies of adolescents in Burma/Myanmar. Theoretical frameworks for further research are proposed for an exploration of the systems of relations in socio- political and economic contexts that influence the development and enactment of Critical Media Health Literacy and health promoting performances of adolescents in Burma/Myanmar.

### **Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships**

2011 Myer Horowitz Award, University of Victoria, Center for Youth & Society

### **Presentations**

1. Beer, C. *Examining an emerging concept for health promotion: How does the concept of Critical Media Health Literacy operate in a high school curriculum situated in Myanmar*, October 2012, Canadian Institutes of Health Research: Advancing Excellence in Gender, Sex and Health Research Conference in Montréal
2. Beer, C. *Information Technology Integration in an International School*, March 2012, SITE – International Conference of the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education

3. Beer, C. *Web 2.0 Technologies in High School Curriculum: Exploring the Culture of Media, Health and Literacy in Myanmar*, February 2012, GlobalTIME – Global Conference on Technology, Innovation, Media and Education
4. Irvine, V., Beer, C., Connelly, K. *Pre-service Teachers' Acceptance of Technology*, June 2010, ED-MEDIA - World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia & Telecommunications

### **Publications**

1. Begoray, D., Wharf Higgins, J., Beer, C., & Harrison, J. (2013). *Take a look: Media and health. Victoria, BC: Ministry of Health.*  
<http://www.healthyschoolsbc.ca/program/541/take-a-closer-look-media-and-health>
2. Wharf Higgins, J., Begoray, D., Beer, C., Harrison, J., & Collins, A. (2012). *Chapter 4: Strategies for measuring and maximizing health literacy of youth*. In R. Marks (Ed)., *Health literacy and school-based health education* (pp. 79-143). Lewes, UK: Emerald Publishing.