Description of my Experience and How I Will Apply it to my Teaching and Learning in the Classroom

Assignment 2 is like no other project I have ever worked on. To be honest, I had no idea that programs like *Comic Life 3* even existed! The project made me think critically about what kind of idea would constitute fake news, and then, how I could turn this into a comic strip. I felt intimidated in approaching this project but repeated one of my favourite phrases to myself: "Once begun, half done!" So, I came up with an idea, including which types of shots to use for which scenes, and sent it to the professor for feedback (all the while holding my breath as I awaited a reply). In hearing back from her, I was thrilled to know my idea fit the criteria and was grateful for her suggested alteration of a couple of shots.

Because my idea takes place in the 1700's, it was important to ensure that my pictures reflected the era. I decided to reach out to my neighbourhood via Facebook to ask if anyone had men's and/or women's attire that was representative of the 1700's or 1800's (I decided to include the 1800's in hopes that a wider variety of people might respond). Within a few hours, a wonderful woman replied saying that she had women's clothing for me. It turns out her church re-enacts the church's founding in 1850 every year, and she sews herself dresses and bonnets to fit the event. I now had women's clothing... but what about men's? I knew that Isaac Newton sported the popular hair of the time, i.e., long and wavy, and having had no offers of men's attire via Facebook, my best shot at re-creating this look was to build my own wig. My imaginative kids had many ideas, one of which was to make individual rolls out of paper, and to tape them together to form a wig. It was a winning plan and that is exactly what we did! As for men's clothing, I knew we needed a longer sports coat, as well as some sort of scarf to add décor to the chest area. This we easily found in our giant box of Halloween costumes. So far, everything was free!

By this point, we had reached picture-taking time. My 9-year-old daughter was thrilled at the prospect of representing Émilie du Châtelet, and her friend, Charlotte, was excited at the idea of being Isaac Newton (I kid you not, Charlotte will one day win an Oscar). With great care to follow the current COVID regulations, Charlotte came over and we shot all the comic images outside. The girls were nothing short of incredible, and my 5-year-old son was sure to shovel snow out of our way whether we needed him to do so or not. In short, the picture-taking was a team effort.

It was now time to attempt the use of Comic Life 3. Earlier that day, my daughter asked if she could try it out and I thought: "Sure! Why not?" It took her only a few minutes to figure out, and it gave me confidence that I could do the same. Once I had worked through a few quirks, I truly started to have fun with the program, the pictures, the speech/thought bubbles, and the colours... EVERYTHING! There was a small learning curve, but I can honestly say I felt more confident in myself after completing the comic than I did when I began. An interesting challenge arose in creating an extreme long shot of Newton expressing "his" genius idea on stage to a large crowd. The problem was, we had neither a stage nor a large crowd. Further, if I took a true

extreme long shot, it would have become far too clear that we were in a 2021 backyard versus a space in the 1700's. It was time to be creative! I decided to take a somewhat long shot of Charlotte standing on our deck, but not from too far back. Then I found an image of an old-fashioned crowd on History.com (its reference is included on the title page of the comic strip) and placed the picture of Charlotte onto the stage portion of this image. Once I applied the black-and-white style within *Comic Life 3*, it did quite a reasonable job of portraying the image I had imagined! As for colour and style selection within the comic, I made two very deliberate choices:

> (1) Since my comic takes place 281 years ago, the images and text boxes should be in black and white.

> (2) Since it is very much a story about the promotion of men in physics throughout history, and conversely, the lack of promotion of women in physics throughout history, I decided to use their speech/thought bubbles as distinguishing features between "man" and "woman". In our society, blue is generally assigned to boys just as pink is generally assigned to girls, and so I coloured the thought/speech bubbles accordingly.

The question is, what have I learned from this project that I will take with me to my teaching and learning in future classrooms?

1. **Money is not needed for great outcomes:** In reaching out to the community, rummaging around in our house, and using our imaginations, we created a world straight out of the 1700's for zero dollars. This taught me that wonderfully imaginative things can be done in the classroom free of charge, i.e. the lack of budget does not have to equate to lack of opportunity, imagination, and learning in the classroom.

2. **Kids will rise to a challenge:** Though my kids had vaguely heard the name "Isaac Newton", they had no real clue of his physics-related fame. Nonetheless, in hearing that we needed to re-create his hair, they quickly jumped on the internet to research his "look" and then brainstormed how to achieve it, particularly his hair. As mentioned, they came up with some genius ideas and "built" the wig themselves. This project reinforced the idea that kids contain ingenuity galore, and it is my job as a teacher to create opportunities for it to flourish. Further, as 9-year-olds, I was secretly not sure how confident my daughter and her friend would be in portraying their characters, but outwardly, I showed nothing but belief and trust in their abilities. As I have stated, they both did a truly fantastic job. This reminded me that if we give students responsibility and challenges and trust in their abilities, they really can and will rise to the occasion.

3. **Do not be afraid of new technology:** As mentioned, I was initially quite intimidated at the prospect of using Comic Life 3; however, I figured it out and really enjoyed it. This has taught me the importance of embracing new technology as it comes my way – something that will be very important as a teacher (and even more so during a worldwide pandemic!).

4. **It is important to consider context:** In creating the comic, I used a font in the text boxes that I thought was more reminiscent of writing in the 1700's (but, still easily legible for the purposes of

the comic). Specifically, I used Monotype Corsiva. In creating the Excel spreadsheet for my final image, however, I realized it was important that the font within the image itself reflect our modern era (because Excel certainly did not exist in the 1700's). To continue the overall look of the comic, I maintained Monotype Corsiva in the text box (as I felt it was still the "same person" telling the story) and selected the same black and white comic style for the image, but I chose Calibri for the font within the spreadsheet. In stopping to consider all these details, it occurred to me that just as the eras in my comic were different from one another and required individual consideration, so too will be all the families and colleagues who I meet throughout my teaching career. It will be important for me to stop and consider each family/colleague individually, to carefully consider the context about which we are communicating, and then to proceed appropriately. (Note: For the speech and thought bubbles, I decided to select a font that was distinct from the text box font, that would be very easy to read, and that was more reminiscent of the font in a classic comic. I looked at my kids' Archie comics for inspiration.)

5. **The value of finding new ways to engage students:** In seeing how positively my daughter reacted to the *Comic Life 3* program, as well as how much I enjoyed this project, it made me realize the importance of introducing variety and creativity in the classroom. As a physics and math major, I look forward to thinking of ways to inject these types of technologies into my classroom.

Overall, this was a really great experience full of fun, surprises, pride, teamwork, and learning experiences. Thank you for setting up this opportunity for us in the Media Literacy class. It is not one I will soon forget.