Abstract

It has always been assumed that consumer education serves the purpose of empowering people in their consumer role. This paper reviews the conventional understanding of consumer education and empowerment and then suggests an alternate approach. The argument is made for consumer education that helps people find their inner power and social potential to challenge the status quo, to change the system from a holistic perspective. Consumer empowerment of this type is totally self-sustaining. Once learned, it cannot be unlearned. This form of sustainable consumer empowerment is the preferred direction for the future of consumer education.

Keywords Consumer education, typology, empowerment, critical, citizens, responsible choices, intentions

The State of the World 2004 report, from the Worldwatch Institute,[1] paints a grim picture of the impact of the global consumer appetite. One recommendation stemming from the report is a call for personal responsibility, from the grassroots, to change consumption practices. The Institute believes that a new understanding of "the good life" can be built around *well-being* instead of *wealth*, meaning people can meet their basic needs along with achieving freedom, health, security, and satisfying social roles. An obvious means of helping people become more responsible for their consumption practices is consumer education. Indeed, it has always been assumed that consumer education serves the purpose of empowering people in their consumer role. This paper reviews the conventional understanding of consumer education and empowerment and then suggests an alternate understanding for your consideration, one that strives for sustainable consumer empowerment (from within) through critical consumer education. An extension of a newly developed consumer education typology is tendered for consideration.

The Conventional Concept of the Empowered Consumer

The conventional understanding of an empowered consumer is someone who has access to information and competition. All three partners in the marketplace have historically held this perception: government, industry and consumers, even consumer educators.

Government

An empowered consumer will use information and take advantage of the competitive market by being knowledgeable, confident, assertive and self-reliant.[2] Most significantly, informed consumers are seen to be empowered consumers who can advocate for themself in their day-to-day consumer affairs.[3] The Commissioner for the new Financial Consumer Agency of Canada notes that, "By educating consumers, by giving them the right financial information, at the right time, consumers will be empowered to make the right decisions" (p.3).[4] A representative of the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) claims that, "Better information makes better educated and empowered consumers. Empowered consumers mean

better competition" (p.1).[5] In an interesting twist, the United Kingdom (UK) Office of Fair Trade (OFT) notes that, "Better information alone will not deliver more empowered consumers" (p.32).[6] Then, the OFT contradicts itself when it titled its recent consultation paper to infer that, in order for business to be successful, consumers have to be empowered. This will happen if we use well-directed and designed consumer education that will provide a set of core skills/actions. The stated goal of the UK government is "empowered consumers driving competition and innovation. Empowered consumers are a vital part of a successful market, improving productivity by making choices between providers" (p.35).[6]

Industry

Many recent marketing and industry articles refer to the *threat* created by an empowered consumer. The Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu[7] firm flagged the empowered consumer as one of the top10 retail industry issues for the near future. They even coined the phrase "*powersumer*" to capture the power people now have to shop and buy on their own terms, instead of those terms dictated by stores. To offset this issue, leaders in industry are calling for the counter power of empowered retailers and stores, on the assumption that the empowered consumer is now "a given" in today's marketplace.[8]

Other businesses make the argument that if a business takes the time to inform a consumer (empower them), this consumer will have less opportunity to take advantage of the firm.[9] Information is power. One industry source even coined the phrase "the attack of the 50-ft empowered consumer," arguing that businesses are losing control of their relationships with consumers, to the detriment of profit.[10] They define the empowered consumer as one who has a wealth of information from multiple sources and countless options in a marketplace replete with a wealth of competition.

The downside for consumer educators is that marketers are now focusing on how to reach this new empowered consumer so they can create, manage and massage relationships with them to continue buying their products. Some businesses argue that because of empowered consumers, marketing efforts will have to change - empowered consumers cannot be pitched, they must be *engaged*.[11] This trend implies that, more than ever, consumers need to be able to find their own inner power so they can critique the marketplace and avoid further exploitation by desperate and greedy retailers.

Consumer Educators

Consumer educators have also been known to perceive consumers to be empowered if they have information and advice. Recent consumer education work, undertaken by Hayward, Coppack and Wells,[12] portrays consumers as being empowered when they can resist a hard sell. In their document, *Consuming Passions*, there is a separate section on the consumer as a global citizen. Separating the notion of citizenship from consumer empowerment reinforces the conventional understanding of the empowered consumer as a self advocate for self-interest. Coppack[13] authored another document about a consensus for a national strategy for consumer education. This document, from the National Consumer Council (NCC) in the UK, stated that "consumer education, enabling more efficient use of advice and information, leads to consumer empowerment"(p.10).[13] Again, although there is recognition of the need for consumers to be responsible for the impact of their decisions, the word empowerment is not used in this section of the discussion. What is said is that, "Consumer education... can raise levels of literacy and numeracy, creating feelings of empowerment" (p.2).[13]

Coppack[13] recommends that the 1999 National Consumer Education Partnership (NCEP)[14] consumer education document be used as a basic framework for consumer education initiatives undertaken as a result of the NCC report to the Office of Fair Trading. NCEP states that the focus of their framework is to protect the interests of consumers through educating them to make wise and efficient choices based on reliable information. Again, at first glance, it seems that this partnership for consumer education embraces the conventional approach to consumer empowerment. Yet, the learning outcomes specify that people educated using this framework will behave responsibly toward the family and larger wider community, understand the impact of their behaviour locally and globally, and analyze the consequences of their choices on the environment and the social context. This consumer education framework brings us closer to the form of empowerment advocated for in this paper because it is a melding of self and mutual interest.

Recent work in the European Union yielded a 2001 consumer education framework document entitled a *European Module for Consumer Education*.[15] The writers preface their work with a summary of the historical approaches to consumer education, work that focused on rights, information, choice and advice (p.14). They then note that the aims of the module are to develop a critically and analytically aware attitude to consumption and to one's action as a consumer in society. Learners will contribute to the education and empowerment of consumers in education and in their adult life (p.74). The authors clarify that the foci of the consumer movement evolved through three phases over the past 50 years, culminating in a focus on consumer consciousness of environmental and social impact of consuming decisions.

Arguing that consumer education curricula have to catch up with this social movement, this 107 page module[15] is designed to prepare students to be active in their citizen role by questioning the hard issues and by changing the collective behaviour of all citizens, as well as changing the institutional framework of society. It comprises a conceptual framework of the main concepts in consumer education (melds work done in the past by other scholars, p.14), followed by a collection of 12 topics (consumer issues or problems), each organized into 20 different sections.

They share this educational philosophy:
Education means personal autonomy and a critical conscience, so the target of consumer education should be to promote active and efficient citizens in consumer issues. Consumer education will only succeed in preparing citizens concerned about their duties towards themselves, towards social justice and towards the global environment if it gives them in a holistic approach, elements for a critical analysis of our consumer society which means an understanding of how society works, of the nature of environmental problems and of their interconnections and contradictions. This requires much more than a scientific appreciation of processes and information about facts; the long-term task for consumer education is to foster and reinforce attitudes, values and behaviour compatible with a new ethic (p.11).[15]

Despite the philosophy, a close examination of the content of the module shows that it still seems to be focused on the traditional consumer empowerment focus (give people information, advice and teach them that they have rights and responsibilities, *relative to the power of the producer*). There is some evidence, albeit scant, that the conceptual framework

contains content that supports the above philosophy. Under the core concept of Information, the module contains a sub-concept called Consequences of Consumer Behaviour. This sub-concept is designed to help people identify environmental, social and monetary costs of their consumption behaviour. Under the core concept of Participation, the module contains a sub-concept called Consumers in the Marketplace, intended to help people appreciate the changing nature of the marketplace and global economy and how they are related to these institutions.

Of interest to the topic of this paper is their inclusion of the three educational ideas of: (a) critical knowledge, social responsibility and ecological responsibility; (b) the importance of acting in an environmentally friendly way; and, (c) the imbalance between first world and third world consumption. Perhaps the philosophy noted above is present in the seven examples of good practice (pp. 70-76).[15] But, at first blush, one would basically find the traditional consumer empowerment approach, with the critical, social responsibility approach present but much less developed. As yet, the notion of finding one's inner power as a citizen in one's consumer role is subliminal at best.

Wells[16] and Wells and Atherton[17] also write passionately about consumer education. While they note that "confident consumers feel in control and empowered to make informed choices for themselves" (p.15),[17] they also note that "consumer education benefits society as a whole by creating more active and better informed *citizens*" [emphasis added] (p.15).[17] They report on the Consumer Education Development Project, 1991-1994, a partnership between Edge Hill College and the UK Consumers' Association. This project, which took direction from the aims for consumer education set out by the NCC in 1989, yielded a conceptual framework for consumer education which includes both the conventional approach to consumer empowerment and a focus on responsible consumer citizenship. Their work, as well as that by Coppack[13] and the framework in the European Module for Consumer Education,[15] is taking us closer and closer to the idea being presented in this paper.

Critical Empowerment - Finding "Me-Power"[1]

Let us examine how else empowerment can be understood aside from having purchase power because one has information. It is important to note that *giving* someone information is helping create the ability (enabling them) to do something, but it is not empowering them. To be enabled means one is provided the means to do something (i.e., given advice, information, buying tips). However, to be empowered entails holding the perception that one has the authority to take action - an inner perception of power. Inner power is created by oneself, not given to by another. When someone finds their inner power, when they come to value their potential and their capacity for self-growth and learning, they gain more control of their destiny. Empowerment refers to increasing political, economic, and social strength of individuals and groups that have been marginalized, exploited, discriminated or excluded from the main power structure in a society (including the marketplace and civil society in a consumer culture).

For a long time, the home economics literature said our role was to "empower people." However, it is now commonly accepted that home economists (and, by association, consumer

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[1] I want to give credit to a graduate student I recently taught in a Peace Pedagogy and Practice course, Pat Murphy, MED, for sharing the concept of *me-power* and giving me permission to use it in my work.

educators) cannot empower anyone. Rather, each person has to go on a personal journey to find their own inner power so they can assume personal responsibility for their actions or inactions. From a critical pedagogy perspective, the role of consumer educators is to create a safe learning environment so that people can feel comfortable examining their values, perceptions, attitudes and world mind set. This critical reflective process can lead to a sense of personal power, "*me-power*," gained from insights and "aha" moments. Future consumer education needs to embrace the critical pedagogical approach.

Benerbaum[18] notes that the more people are encouraged and enabled to do things and to think for themselves, the more their abilities and competence increase and the more self-reliant they become; that is, they become empowered because they perceive themselves as having the power to take action and control of conditions affecting their day-to-day lives. Empowerment is acting with integrity to create the environment in which we and others can develop character, competence and synergy.[19] If this is the case, consumer educators striving to facilitate the creation of empowered consumers are charged with creating an educational environment where learners can develop moral character, citizen competence and collaborative synergy. The next two sections of the paper offer a discussion of different approaches to consumer education and some suggestions for what a critical consumer educational environment might look like.

A Typology of Consumer Education as Critical Empowerment

In review, there is an empowered consumer with purchasing power and then there is an empowered citizen acting in their consumer role. The former helps someone serve their own interests and the latter helps people serve the common interest. Some intriguing work has been done around the topic of the relationship between the way consumer education is taught and the kind of consumer that is formed. Table 1 summarizes the recent work of Sandlin[20] and Flowers et al.[21] and presents an extension of their thinking in a fourth type of consumer education advocated for in this paper, that of an empowered consumer who has found their inner voice, their inner power to advocate for others and the environment, as well as for themselves.

<u>Insert Table 1 about here</u>

Because of its critical focus, Type 4 consumer education offers an approach that facilitates learners gaining freedom that comes from knowing who they are and how they have been shaped by their social, economic and political world.[22] It encourages critical discourse analysis,[23] a focus on human and social development (in addition to economic development),[24] a respect for sustainability, and an appreciation for the distinction between being a consumer and being a global citizen.[25] It entrenches the importance of always questioning what it means to live in a consumer society and of knowing deep inside that there are alternatives.[26,27] Type 4 consumer education even hints at the links between peace and consumerism (lack of social justice, freedom, equality and security) and implies that consumerism is a form of deep violence in our market and social structures.[28,29]

Interestingly enough, Vaines[30] shares three orientations to practice that home economics professionals could embrace: no choice (powerless), technical (power over) and empowerment (power through people and power with others). There is incredible synergy between her professional practice model (which also applies to consumer educators) and the four types of consumer education set out in Table 1. Types 1 and 2 are similar to the technical power-over approach to professional practice in that educators are teaching people that, as consumers, they need information etc, etc in order to redress the power that business holds over them. Type 3 is a

movement towards empowerment practice in that some authority is challenged in light of social responsibilities to all living systems (at least on the environmental front). However, Type 3 consumer education still holds a focus on individuals changing just their own behaviour in order to serve their own interest and that of the natural environment. The social and human components (other citizens living elsewhere, the next generation and those not born) are still missing.

Type 4 consumer education fits Vaines'[30] empowerment model of professional practice in that change is from the bottom up by those assuming that the world is everyone's home and that social structures which are created by people (e.g., consumer society, global markets, etc.) should serve the people and not serve those in concentrated power.[1] Also, language is examined and reflected upon in Type 4 consumer education because the words we use, and our stories, reflect the power structures in society. Furthermore, Type 4 consumer education assumes that every day life is a conscious experience in which people actively participate. If people are oppressed by others' actions, or their own internal biases and prejudices, they cannot participate as fully in this daily life. Consumer educators would be cognizant of this relationship and call for people to see themselves as fellow citizens first, and consumers second. Finally, the empowerment approach to practice holds that the common good and moral vision is to live in harmony with all living species - a position that engenders hope. Type 4 consumer education embraces this vision.

Discussion and Implications for Consumer Educators

Empowerment is the result of libratory learning. Liberation means freedom and emancipation from oppressive power-over. The challenge for consumer educators is to help learners see that they are oppressed in the marketplace and that the actions they take in this oppressed state have profoundly negative results on them, others and the environment.[31] Sandlin and St. Clair[32] agree that the challenge of material oppression is serious and that educators need to create critical spaces within consumer education. In these spaces, learners can become conscious of the incredibly oppressive power of materialism and consumerism and that there are alternatives to this lifestyle. Consumer educators must change the way they approach educating people to be consumers, such that they strive for a combination of Type 3 and Type 4 consumer education. If they did this, they would create learners who see themselves as citizens in a consuming role, holding profound responsibility for the future of the planet and others. Until this conscientization occurs, people will remain locked in themselves without access to their inner power to change the world.

Critique Pervasive Power

To facilitate consciousness raising in critical educational experiences, consumer educators need to learn how to teach others to engage in a critique of the pervasive power of the consumer society. To critique something involves the process of investigating and denouncing social and individual damages caused by power. People who involve themself in the role of critiquing something are: (a) interested in power relations and societal inequalities, (b) concerned for forms of education which are liberating rather than merely adjusting and coping, and (c) seeking forms of education that points to new possibilities for thought and action rather than reinforcing the status quo.[23, 33] People who critique a situation are eagerly striving for *praxis*. They are concerned with real material inequality in the consumer society and then seek to link the insights they have gained from their critique to subsequent social and political action.[32]

Six Stages to Inner Power

It is also useful for consumer educators to appreciate that there are six "stages" that people move through as they find their inner power. That is, as they become empowered, they:
- realize that someone has control over them, that they have a lack of access to resources or that someone has power over them or a situation. They would face a feeling of powerlessness, oppression or suspicion that something is not right;
- will examine the situation to discover forces which are oppressive or limiting, including inner constraints (bias, prejudices, lack of skills);
- will have to face the questions that arise from this critical examination because long standing, unexamined assumptions will be challenged;
- will look at the world critically, asking several questions so they can tease out the deep hidden values and ideology at play that result in concentrations of power:
    - How am I expected to act or conform in this situation? Who says so?
    - Who's interest is being best served if I act this particular way?
    - What is the standard for this type of expected behaviour? Who set it and why?
    - What do others gain by my behaviour in this situation?
    - What am I not seeing? What is happening behind the scenes to keep someone else in power or me without power?
    - What mental blocks or visors are blocking my view? What obstacles exist in my mind that prevent me from "seeing myself"?;
- will talk with others (dialogue and conversations) about this, trying to discover how they feel about everything; and,
- will ask "what should I do now? What actions do I want to take now that the blinders have been removed from my eyes and I can '*see*'?"[34]

The Languages of Critique, Possibilities and Action

To help people engage in this process of social critique, it is useful to appreciate that they have to learn several new languages. To become critically literate, they have to learn (a) the language of critique, (b) the language of possibilities, and (c) the language of action.[35] That is, the education system would prepare consumers who are willing and able to try gain: (a) personal freedom from internal constraints, such as biases or lack of a skill or point of view; and, (b) social freedom from external constraints, such as oppression, exclusion and abuse of power relations. Then, they would be willing, and able, to move beyond the negative distortions and oppression revealed through the critique of the world and find a place of hope, self-determination, potential and dreams of a better world. Finally, and most importantly, the consumer education process would prepare people who are transformed (changed inside) to the point that they take social and political action to address the inequities and oppression existing in our consumer culture. Very useful details about these three new languages is shared in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Responsible Intentions and Choices

Another action that consumer educators can take is to broaden their perception of what is entailed in making responsible choices. Conventional consumer education understands responsible choice to mean getting good value for the dollar, discovering complaint procedures before buying, shopping around between many competitors, and the like. A responsible consumer will be one who is aware of their rights and is as informed on as many fronts as possible before entering into a transaction. Critical consumer education for sustainable consumer empowerment

would balance this concept of responsibility, and the consequences that come with being irresponsible, with another perspective on cause and effect (action and consequences).

To be more specific, in their book on responsible choice, *The Mind of the Soul*, Zukav and Francis[36] tender a new understanding of choice that seems very appropriate for consumer educators seeking to help consumers find their inner power and voice. They explain that, in order for people to be responsible, they have to become aware of their intentions, their will, *before* they act. They suggest that it is the will (one's intention) behind the action that is the key rather than the specific action taken.

A consumer example will be used to explain this idea. Two consumers are considering the purchase of stocks. One consumer buys stocks which will have a high return on investment but are from a company that also makes arms and weapons. The other consumer buys stocks which will have a high return on investment, but this company has a policy to not invest capital in, or source resources from, countries that buy arms and weapons. The actions are the same but the intentions are not. The first individual intends to benefit herself while the second person intends to benefit others while benefitting herself. The effect of the former purchase is to perpetuate the making and selling of arms and weapons and the effect of the second is to support a corporation that is socially responsible to other citizens. The *cause* of the actual effect is the intention, not the action of buying the stocks. Be-*cause* of the intention, these two consumers buy stocks but with very different consequences.

Consumer educators embracing this stance would teach people how to make different consumer choices. They would urge people to stop and ask themselves, "What consequences do I want?" If a consumer wants to see social justice, enforcement of human rights, integrity of the natural environment and the like, their intentions will be different than one who wants to benefit themselves, get ahead of the Joneses, save money, live a particular lifestyle, et cetera. Key to this approach to consumer education is the deep idea that an intention is the quality of consciousness one brings to an action.[36] When one consciously chooses (with a conscience) a specific intention, one chooses an intended consequence - a responsible choice. Consumer educators would encourage people to pose the question, "What kind of world do I want to live in?" Then, they would have the person ask themself, "What can I do to make *me* the kind of consumer that I want to see in my world?" Remember, from this perceptive on responsible consumer choices, the consequences are determined by the consumer's intentions, not their ultimate actions. Consumers will learn to create the experiences they desire by choosing their intentions. When one chooses an intention, one chooses a consciousness - a deep state of awareness. This awareness leads to the creation of authentic consumer power - power that comes from one's soul and inner self - *me-power*.

Summary

In short, this paper described the conventional approach to consumer education, juxtaposing it with an alternate approach. The conventional approach assumes that consumers are empowered if they have information, advice and lots of competition in the marketplace. Four recent consumer education curriculum efforts in the UK and Europe were analyzed using the conventional consumer education lens. The results suggest that their efforts are bringing the field closer to the approach being tendered in this paper - sustainable consumer empowerment through critical consumer education. The alternate approach presented in this paper questions the sustainability of the conventional approach to educating consumers, claiming that it results in

consumers striving for power "over" the producer and other citizens rather than power "with." Indeed, the alternate approach to consumer education would yield people who will be forever changed as a result of the education they receive because they will have found their inner power, their inner voice as a global citizen.

Drawing on exciting work being done in the field,[20, 21] the paper then tendered a typology of four different "types" of consumer education, advocating for Types Three and Four, respectively, a critical approach for self-interest and the empowerment approach for mutual interest. The presentation of this typology was followed by some concrete suggestions for consumer educators: (a) teach others to engage in a critique of the pervasive power of the consumer society, (b) teach others that there are six stages involved in finding one's inner power, (c) help people engage in the process of social critique by learning the new languages of critique, possibilities and action; and, (d) teach people about a new kind of responsible choice focused on one's intentions rather than the actual choice made in the marketplace.

Conclusion

Power is the root word of empowerment. Consumer educators have always been concerned with helping consumers have power in the marketplace. This has traditionally meant that education programs tended to give consumers information and advice, teach them how to make rational, efficient choices, and sensitize them to their rights (relative to businesses) and the protection of these rights that governments have entrenched in law. This form of education tries to balance the power between the seller and the buyer but does not question why the power existed nor does it examine the negative impacts of this power relationship. This approach to consumer education may have served people in the past, but the marketplace has changed profoundly. We now face rampant consumerism, global markets and deep disconnections between the 1.7 Billion people living in the consumer society, and the rest of the world and the environment.

Consumer education has to keep pace with these global changes. One way is to move from seeing the empowered consumer as someone who is trained to serve their own self interest to preparing citizens who are critical of their role in a consumer society, a different sort of power. In this case, power, still the root of empowerment, refers to *inner power* freed up because of inner reflection, deep examination of the power relationships in our consumer society and emancipation in one's role as a global citizen acting in one of many roles, including a consumer. The result is new social power to change the system rather than just change individual behaviour in the current system. The term coined by industry comes into play here - *the powersumer*, but now it can refer to someone who has found their inner power and social potential to challenge the status quo, to change the system from a holistic perspective and to appreciate that empowerment of this type is totally self-sustaining. Once learned, it cannot be unlearned. This form of critical, sustainable consumer empowerment is the preferred direction for the future of consumer education.

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Table 1 - Four Types of Consumer Education and Resultant Type of Consumer [20, 21]

TYPE 1 Consumer Information, Protection and Advocacy		TYPE 2 Individual Critique for Self Interest		TYPE 3 Critical Approach for Self Interest		TYPE 4 Empowerment Approach for Mutual Interest	
Nature of Consumer Education	Type of Consumer shaped by this education	Nature of Consumer Education	Type of Consumer shaped by this education	Nature of Consumer Education	Type of Consumer shaped by this education	Nature of Consumer Education	Type of Consumer shaped by this education
. taught to navigate the consumer world and make better decisions . provided or transferred information . learn about rights and, to a lesser extent, responsibilities . taught technical skills (budget, interest) .intent it to avoid markets exploiting them . learn about consumer protection and competition policies . consumer advocacy and redress	. think consuming is good and natural . assume they must participate in the consumer culture (they have the key role in the economy) . see consuming as a way to self development, self resilience and self realization (buy more and spend more to succeed) . equate success with money, prestige, accumulation of brand name stuff	. taught to question the role of consumption in their own life - take responsibility for their self . this questioning leads to people making individual changes in their spending patterns and life styles	. focus is on their self interest so their level of reflection is still un-sophisticated . just beginning to question what it means to live in a consumer society, with a focus on environmental impact . take individual action to simplify and ecofy their own lifestyles . too busy downshifting to reflect on the structure of the consumer society and the market as the real problem (the imbalance of power between citizens, government and business)	. teaches people to be critical citizens in their consumer role . taught to be critical of context within which they consumer (market and consumer society) . addresses structural factors and economic and social inequities that disempowers the consumer to *act in their own self interest* . teaches people to be reflective so they can change their lifestyle so current system is not propagated	.some become ethical consumers, green consumers or anti-consumers . recognize the deep impact of the hegemony of consumption . do not accept consumerism as natural part of life . ironically, they see the consumer culture as a perfect site to resist the consumer culture .resist by striving to interrupt the day-to-day flow of the consuming life style by jamming the culture (make others aware of how pervasive it really is in *their* lives) . main focus is to free self from the grasp of the market (but not totally extended to the plight of others yet)	. takes Type 3 even further, moving beyond self interest to mutual interest .does so by adopting a pedagogy that facilitates people finding their own inner power and potential . teaches people to apply pressure to challenge the current global, national and local systems . helps people think beyond the private sphere to common good and common interest . extends teaching to include social and human impact of consumption . teaches we can have a more authentic culture than exists now .teaches that everyone can be a leader and has potential	. see themselves as citizens first and consumers second (global citizenship) . have found their inner power and potential as a citizen to change the world for the better . unafraid to challenge and change the system rather than just changing people and their individual lifestyles like Type 3 . embrace a holistic perspective (everything is connected) . know that once someone becomes empowered, it is a self-sustaining, life long process . possess a deeply held, personally validated value system that cherishes all life, past, present and future

Table 2   Three Languages for Empowered, Critical Consumer Education (culled from Rehm[34])

Language of critique (unearthing *unspoken* assumptions, values and ideologies)

Critical consciousness	a slow realization that people *do* have the power to change things that keep them down, marginalized, exploited
Problem posing	by telling one's own, and reading other's, stories, one can gain the skill to *name* the problem in one's life created due to abuse of power
Self-reflection	get people to try to figure out "why you are doing what you do in your daily life." These actions, or habits, that keep people down trodden or not liberated include: self-doubt, biases, resentment, compulsions, unthinking acceptance of popular ideas, dependence on experts, bad habits, and boredom. Reflecting on these things can lead to the creation of new labels and names for the things that happen in people's daily life. With this understanding, people can reframe things so they are not unthinking or destructive but rather true and moral.
Social critique	Unpeeling the beliefs, attitudes and actions that contribute to subordination of most people by a very few (elite), reveals the current power relations. Once they are exposed, it is easier to challenge the patterns of domination and change the balance of power so people no longer "buy into" a false consciousness - their awareness can now be continually feed by ongoing exposure of the plot to keep them down so elite interests can be served.

Language of Possibility and Potential

Once people have unveiled the negative conditions that keep them oppressed, they can reframe their thinking so they can see the possibilities of breaking free of the oppression. This is achieved by three actions:

Personal voice	when people realize they can change inside (transform), they find their personal voice and realize that it is valid and needs to be heard in the larger discussions of what society could be like, should be like.
Agency	agency is the ability to organize future situations and resource distribution. Capacity for agency grows as our social imagination grows, as we work to describe how our lives should be constructed so there is no oppression or inequality. As we spell out hope (a connection with the future), we will gain inner power to organize things so that future can emerge
Authorship	in order to move from being an object that others manipulate to a subject (someone) who is actively involved in constructing their new voice, people have to take ownership of, and express, their ideas to others, leading to collective action (see below). They have to develop their own ideas and voice and voice them to others (called authoring).

Language of Action

Dialogue	involves talking, listening, sharing, perspective taking, questioning, responding, reframing, adapting, suggesting, and even challenging even silence (which could indicate confusion, anger, discomfort, anxiety, serious contemplation (consider carefully and at length))
Consensus building	through dialogue (listening to understand where others are coming from), people can learn from the opposing view, from contradictions to their own view, leading to *growth of their own social imagination* as multiple perspectives, the world experienced by others, are shared and assimilated
Take collective action	as a result of focusing on power distortions and social contradictions (negative conditions), people end up in collective action to right the wrongs. This action is positive - cooperative, inclusive and caring in nature (knowing people on a deeper level) - and based on nurtured, helping relationships. People's worth, trust and capabilities are nurtured - power is shared not hoarded or abused