

BEYOND MEDIA LITERACY IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

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A Project Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Evergreen State College  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the degree  
Master in Teaching  
2010

This Project for the Master in Teaching Degree

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has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

by

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June 2010

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the entire 2008-2010 Master in Teaching cohort. Also, I wish to thank my parents for allowing me to spend early Saturday mornings immersed in Sesame Street. It was on that fateful street where I met a creature that would help guide my future development as a human being. Above all else, I would like to thank the Cookie Monster. I also extend my gratitude to Jon Davies for his assistance in the completion of this project.

## ABSTRACT

The following research on media literacy education investigates the question: How can a media literacy curriculum help transform the literacy practices of a secondary Language Arts classroom, so that they might meet the shifting demands of a digital communication landscape? In understanding the emergence of media literacy over the past eighty years, the evolving nature of media and the experience of the audience become central points around which many modern educational initiatives focus. The findings suggest that educators must seek an understanding of the transforming digital media landscape, while providing opportunities for students to generate their own media messages, and thus their own meaning across space and time. In doing so, students might cultivate their voice in a meaningful movement toward genuine civic engagement.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Our aural and visual senses are immersed in an environment where our minds can virtually extend to all parts of the world. Mediated by individual choice, subjectivities, and availability, the experience of the world through communication technologies expands and limits our ability to perceive this constantly growing and evolving milieu. Much attention has been paid to the rapid pace with which our lives have been surrounded by the mediation and transmission of information across varying distance. Under these conditions, the definition of literacy, itself an evolving and historically situated term, grows into a complex set of skills that allows the viewer to read, understand, deconstruct, and critique the range of human communication potential, or *texts*. Facial expressions, billboards, Shakespeare in print, or Shakespeare performed on stage become unique texts available for reading and understanding. Each text presents its own set of possibilities, and in transmission across media (as in a Shakespeare play read in print or experienced on stage) loses and gains new interpretations and qualities.

We now face the transmission of information in a variety of forms and are called upon to decode and understand the symbols and restrictions that guide each old or new medium. Increasingly, The shifting perception of what it means to be literate in our democratic society situates the citizen as able researcher. The citizen as researcher is able to access the right information when it is needed, along with determining the validity of the information. The line between information and entertainment continue to blur in this evolving mediated environment. When applied to the realm of secondary education, educators must engage the abundance of relevant “texts” coursing through the ether in an effort to promote critical and creative higher-order thinking. When students spend close to eight hours a day engaged with some form of media, their ability to critique and understand

the mountains of messages, advertisements, and information becomes paramount to their ability to function as engaged citizens and community members (Foehr, et al, 2005).

As Cortes (1997) pointed out,

Schools are not synonymous with education. They are only a part of education. Alongside school operates a parallel educational system, the 'societal curriculum'...Within that societal curriculum, the media serve as pervasive, relentless, lifelong educators...so-called entertainment media...have a major impact in shaping beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions, and 'knowledge' and influencing decisions and action (p. 75).

The following three chapters seek to explore the question: How can a media literacy curriculum help transform the literacy practices of a secondary Language Arts classroom, so that they might meet the shifting demands of a digital communication landscape? This paper looks at the development of media literacy within primary, secondary, and post-secondary contexts, and seeks to establish a set of practices and understandings that help bridge media literacy with the more traditional Language Arts classroom. These chapters will also seek to highlight the emerging world of new and multiple literacies. This shift in literacy, as it is practiced outside of school, demands recognition from educators. It indicates the need for revisions to perceptions and curriculums. Ultimately, media literacy as a set of concepts and understandings must undergo a radical rethinking if it is to remain a viable and relevant approach to our mediated screen environment.

#### Rationale

Having grown up during the tail end of America's 20<sup>th</sup> Century postindustrial consumer culture, I have experienced my own mediated environment. Watching hours of television, listening to the radio in my father's car and absorbing movie after movie, I have known no other life. Yet, it was at the moment that I ventured a critical look on the shifting



and puzzling role that media played in the experience of my 'life,' and self-perception, that I began to absorb myself in its influence. In becoming a secondary language arts educator, I hope to integrate my life as teacher with my life as citizen. Because my personal, ethical, and political subjectivities cannot be separated from the curricular discourse that shapes my classroom environment, I hope to use this study of the media literacy discipline as a platform by which I might study and challenge my different subject positions as educator. As I will highlight in the coming pages, my thinking about this topic has undergone a dramatic shift, and with it, my determination to enact a media literacy curriculum. The importance of expanding concepts of reading and writing beyond the traditional texts of Language Arts classrooms highlights an educator's ability to seek student guidance and input. The students currently entering schools have far more experience with evolving digital technologies than the educators charged with preparing them for a world shaped by these tools. Yet, this experience does not preclude a critical awareness of how these digital technologies shape and situate an individual's identity, nor the potentials to remake traditional views of the media and the audience. Both educators and students stand to gain from the focus and potentials contained in a properly enacted media literacy curriculum.

Grounded in the theory of Friere's literacy projects, media literacy joined with the language arts curriculum can further enable students "to read the world in order to reshape it" (Sholle and Denski, 1994, p. 22). If future generations are going to be able to take on the different social, economic, environmental and political problems that await them, public schools and the educational community cannot ignore the need to prepare their students for active and critical democratic citizenship. They must equip them to navigate the media barrage. Thus schools can no longer rely on traditional definitions of literacy that center on printed text. To guarantee universal literacy and the social enfranchisement of all citizens, education must seek to promote the critical study and creation of media.

As educators abandon the popular perception of youth as passive media spectator, and understand their position as multimodal designer, we can work to make education an inclusive and evolving sphere where definitions of literacy can help empower students to both subvert the established media outlets while promoting a democratic plurality of voices.

### Controversies

Within the discourse of media, technology, and education there exists several continuing controversies. Educators and cultural purists alike bemoan the degradation of the English language at the hands of teenage text messaging and online chat rooms. While issues of privacy and the social networking continue to permeate discussions of students and their uses of the internet. Studies report the negative effects of television on a child's sleep patterns, while Mothers across the country decry the on their children:

According to the American Psychological Association's 1993 report, *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response*, there is not just one but four long term effects of viewing violence:

1. Increased aggressiveness and anti-social behavior.
2. Increased fear of being or becoming a victim.
3. Increased desensitization to violence and victims of violence.
4. Increased appetite for more and more violence in entertainment and real life.

(Thoman, 1995, p. 35)

Reports have found their way into local and national newspapers highlighting the pitfalls of the so-called "out-of-school literacies." In Miami, six teenage girls beat up a classmate and filmed the attack. The girls later posted the video on YouTube, the popular Internet video site. It was suggested that the beating served as retaliation for comments posted on a

MySpace page (Cave, 2008). In another story, a Missouri woman was convicted of three misdemeanor charges for her role in a cyberbullying case. The young victim of the attack committed suicide following the end of an online courtship initiated by the woman, Lori Drew, and her daughter under a fake MySpace account (Steinhauer, 2008). These stories, among many others, serve to perpetuate the growing fear among educators and administrators that such Internet use should be banned and censored within school. At the same time, little attention is paid to the way such stories color and shape the country's perceptions of adolescents, and the effects such perceptions may have on public policy (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2007). Informed educators of media should recognize these stories as potentially dramatized incidents that do deserve our attention, but not the reactionary practices and policies that situate students as potential violent offenders of the digital age.

Even with the challenges posed from sensationalist news reports and outraged community leaders, there remains an even stronger stumbling block in the effort to inform a public school curriculum with critical media literacy. The growing emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing presents little room in Language Arts classroom to investigate the realm of media literacy. Little opportunities may be available to deviate from a curriculum rooted in the reading and writing of print-based texts. The current trend in policy and reform debates centers on a "back-to-basics" approach to school curriculum. Unnecessary add-ons, as they are deemed, and innovative approaches to literacy will face resistance in their future implementation.

Despite educators or policy makers appearing in favor of media literacy, there are often issues regarding the definitions that guide the process of creating curriculum. The residue of past protectionist philosophies, stances rooted in the early history of media literacy, seek to protect innocent children from the harmful influences of violent and overly

sexualized media texts. As chapter two will outline, the authority of cultural studies and postmodernism offers a convincing counter to the uncomplicated protectionist view of media and the exchange taking place with young users. For most of the past twenty years, this splintered perception of media literacy's purpose has prevented the unification of one vision for best practices.

### Definitions

This paper will utilize the definition of *literacy* outlined by Colin Lankshear and Michelle Knobel (2008). Their use of the term recognizes the social and historical nature of literacy, and is influenced by the theoretical work of James Gee and Paulo Freire. Literacy is defined here as, "socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within the context of participation in Discourses" (p.64). The emphasis in this definition goes beyond the act of simply reading a text in a limited comprehension sense, and highlights the extended connection of literacy to an individual's lived experience and identity.

The term *media literacy* will refer to the development of tools for critically analyzing images, language, and speech, while empowering people with "contemporary implements of public discourse: video, graphic arts, photography, computer-assisted journalism and layout, and performance" (Ewen, 2001, p449). As the next chapters will show, the changing set of tools and implements of public discourse indicate a need for expanding the concept of media literacy.

For the following sections the term *Media* refers to tools by which news, information, and entertainment are mediated, or transmitted and negotiated through the medium, be it television, the Internet, newspapers, paper, voice, or gesture. Media also includes the growing realm of digital and communication technologies. Here media is no longer the simple transmission of an encoded text via different technological outlets, but the

conversation that has now begun to take place in more interactive Web 2.0 forums (Lankshear and Knobel, 2008). This paper assumes among the many goals of organized media, a fundamental goal of communicating through space and time with the widest possible audience.

*Protectionism*, also known as inoculationism or impact mediation, identifies efforts to protect the viewer from the harmful effects of media. The viewer, or consumer, is treated as a passive actor. It is the job of the educator to help students learn to protect themselves. Protectionism draws influence from modernist perspectives that assume to classify both high and low forms of culture. This method of media literacy instruction assumes to know good media from bad media, and determines to undue any previous influence already being exerted on the viewers.

*Media Production* is the process by which students or professionals bring a media text into being. The production process includes the planning stages, the planning out of the message, the creation of the text across whatever mediums will be used, the editing of the text and message, and the transmission of the message or text. Finally, *text* refers to all human or non-human objects, digital representations, images, words, ideas, etc. that can be read for meaning.

#### Limitations

As the history of media and technology in the classroom will point out, there no longer appears to be a question of whether media has a place in the curriculum of today's public schools. The question centers on how this form of expression and cultural production is to be presented. Will students simply accept the credibility and validity of the information they receive via their television, computer monitor, or cell phone, or will they ask questions of the established order and seek to offer their own voice to the democratic discourse necessary to affect change in our society. This paper seeks to understand the changing

landscape of mediated experience. It centers on the validity and the need to rethink current approaches to media literacy within a new literacies framework, which makes use of the collaborative, participatory, and creative potentials emerging from new digital tools of communication. The paper does not seek to outline *all* the possible classroom practices that could inform a media literacy focus, but it does seek to offer ways a Secondary Language Arts teacher may investigate their own assumptions about literacy while building a relevant and meaningful classroom space that fosters critical investigation and understandings. At the same time, this could provide motivation for educators to approach and understand media and its impact on their own lives, decision-making, and thinking, allowing them to take a more informed perspective in the classroom.

#### Summary

This paper seeks to answer the question: How can a media literacy curriculum help transform the literacy practices of a secondary Language Arts classroom, so that they might meet the shifting demands of a digital communication landscape? As this introduction suggests, understanding and implementing a media literacy curriculum may be the only way to maintain the relevancy of current language arts classrooms. Yet as the world of mediated experience undergoes a transformation, educators shall be pushed to update and challenge their own understandings. The classroom shall acknowledge new and emerging forms of expression and meaning. The complication in revising the focus of a Language Arts classroom may come from the controversies surrounding the potential 'dangers' that such media present to students and the school environment. While these dangers may be exaggerated, they remain a point of contention when arguing for the expansion of media literacy within public school disciplines. The next chapter will look at the history and social context surrounding the growth of media literacy both inside and outside the U.S. This historical focus will help identify a shifting landscape of media, the changing perceptions of

individuals and how they interact with the world, and the need to consistently revise media literacy approaches.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Introduction

Chapter one offered an introduction into the emerging field of media literacy, and introduced the guiding question for this research; How can a media literacy curriculum help transform the literacy practices of a secondary Language Arts classroom, so that they might meet the shifting demands of a digital communication landscape? Because students immerse themselves in media for extended periods of time and through a variety of different mediums, it is in the best interest of educators to meet students in their experience, while understanding and working within this evolving realm of mediated communications and experience. More importantly, Language Arts educators should reconsider their beliefs about reading and writing. There is an immediate need to expand perceptions of literacy in relation to new media and communications technologies. It is these changing perceptions, which might help reconstruct the curriculum of a secondary Language Arts classroom around more relevant and enduring reading and writing practices. Yet, traditional perceptions of reading and writing still prevail in current classroom practices, and controversies surrounding the perceived 'value' of newer literacy practices continue to stand in the way of meaningful dialogue between students and educators. The hope is that in answering the central question of this paper, new directions and possibilities may be available to educators as they seek to re-evaluate and re-shape their own understandings and classroom practices.

This next chapter will focus on the historical development of media studies and the term *media literacy*, around the world, and here in the United States. Media studies will be identified as an academic discipline with an evolving set of perspectives and approaches. The chapter will identify how educators have historically viewed their role in educating students to interpret and interact with mass media and communication technologies. The



history of media literacy within the United States will be detailed, and the splintered set of objectives rooted in the various perceptions of entertainment and information media will be highlighted. With this in mind, we will look at how this lack of unity contributed to the nation lagging behind much of the world in instituting a more progressive and critical approach to media education. Finally, the chapter will highlight the unifying principles that have emerged over the past decade to help establish the subject of media and media literacy within primary and secondary school curriculums.

### The Beginning: Media Studies

The rapid growth and expansion of media industries throughout the 20th century made possible the birth of a field dedicated entirely to the study of avenues by which individuals or groups communicate with and entertain a vast audience. With the explosion of mass-circulation newspapers, radio, motion pictures, and television, the media landscape diversified in both message and medium. It was the pervasiveness of media within the context of nascent theories of crowd and mass psychology courtesy of Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud that offered scholars and academics a focus in their efforts to understand media and its effects.

Media studies emerged between the 1930's and 40's in response to the major roles such forms of communication technologies served in the use of propaganda during WWII. Opinions within the field of American communication studies saw burgeoning urban centers as home to a faceless and vulnerable mass of individuals. Heavily influenced by the work of French sociologist and psychologist Gustave Le Bon, the study of communication technologies focused on the media as it functioned to control and shape a popular "mass" (Ewen, 1995, p. 72). This perspective on media studies became known as the functionalist approach. Paul Lazarfeld of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University "argued that media has administrative functions and enforces existing social forms," and

reduces public action because people are too busy consuming (Sardar, 2000, p. 22). This lens negated the individual within these masses, and demonstrated an implicit condescension for the working classes who populated the dense city landscapes.

Between 1940 and into the 1960's a shift in research sought to focus on effects studies of the mass media on the public. Effects studies posited the individual as a member of different social groups that maintained a hierarchy of leaders and 'opinion-formers' who actively shaped and disseminated information and opinions. During this period of study, early protectionist notions of good and bad media began to take shape. Researchers increasingly "believed that media lowered the cultural standards through its excessively popular outputs" (Sardar, 2000, p. 22). The influence of media violence on children also became a focus of study and increased research during this period of media studies development.

Effects studies came under heavy criticism as media identified increasingly with ideology. While the nation moved into the politically and socially tumultuous years of the 1960's, the political effects of mass media were viewed no longer as simply impacting voter perceptions. The 1970's saw the viewer become an active participant, "through the influence of semiological, structuralist, and post-structuralist thinkers such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, who through their deconstruction of the text and ideology of empowerment against dominant discourses, offered the viewer the possibility of a more active role" (Sardar, 2000, p. 38). This paradigm shift gave birth to the uses and gratifications theory of Elihu Katz and Denis McQuail, among others. McQuail identified "diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance" (Sardar, 2000, p. 31) as the four main reasons audiences interacted with and consumed media. This range of potential interactions encouraged academics and educators to think more critically on the complexity of an individual's media interactions.

Despite the growing insistence on the individual as an active participant in the mediated interaction, the Frankfurt School, a loose collection of intellectuals from the Institute for Social Research, challenged the notion of an active audience by identifying the media as “a cultural industry that maintained power relations and served to lessen the resistance standards of cultural aesthetics by popularizing certain types of culture” (Sardar, 2000, p. 34). In the critical theory of Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, and Walter Benjamin, the audience’s “ability to function efficiently as citizens in a democratic state is replaced by their ceaseless consumption of culture or products, or both” (p. 34). Rooted in the economic theories of Karl Marx, The Frankfurt school added yet another lens to the growing body of theory on media and its interactions.

In 1964, The Canadian literacy scholar Marshall McLuhan identified the medium as the message complicating and reshaping the direction of contemporary media studies. According to McLuhan, it is the medium, not the content that shapes the mind of the audience. It is the changing and evolution of different mediums that allows scholars to fully understand and appreciate the influence of older mediums on cultural behaviors and perceptions. His theory of media indicated a technological determinism, which suggested that each new medium shapes our senses to produce “certain inevitable social outcomes” (Sardar, 2000, p. 37). It was under these various theoretical influences that educators and policy makers determined the role of a media-focused education in schools of the industrialized West.

#### The Evolution of Media Literacy Around the World

Robert Kubey (1998) identifies the period between the 1930’s and 1960’s as a protectionist period in Europe. In response to concerns that the public remained vulnerable to the mass media’s potentially controlling influence, countries adopted paternalistic and defensive educational principles. The efforts stemmed from growing outcry over allegedly

disturbing media effects and were driven by a misplaced moral panic. It was believed that once the crude manipulateness and cheap emotional falsity of popular culture was exposed to students, they would recognize and condemn these consistent sources of personal pleasure (Buckingham, 1998, p. 34). This approach to media education functioned under the assumption that there existed discernibly good and bad forms of media and entertainment. Situated within modernism, this perspective ignored the often biased and elitist perceptions of what created these high and low media distinctions. With a cultural studies approach to media gaining force in the academic community, more pluralistic educational efforts began to emerge from these initially narrow protectionist aims.

As David Buckingham (1998) points out, the 1960's saw the founding of British cultural studies. "Culture no longer was seen as a fixed set of privileged artifacts- a literary canon for example- but as 'a whole way of life.' Cultural expression was seen to take a variety of forms, from the exalted to the everyday" (p. 34). Media became locked in an individual's assumption of various daily identities. The spreading of cultural studies established a new lens with which to view media studies, yet the focus in public schools, internationally, remained a defensive protection of students from the negative effects of media (Buckingham, 1998, p. 36). Underneath evolving media scholarship, students were still taught to resist U.S. cultural imperialism, the onslaught of sex and violence, the consumerist doctrine, or even political beliefs and ideologies.

By the 1980's developments in Britain, Australia, Canada, and in Latin America, involving further research into media literacy, began to shift the long held notion of students as mystified participants in the media world. Researchers developed a much more complex view of the ways in which children make judgments about the media, and "how they use the media to form their personal and social identities" (Buckingham, 1998, p. 37). Fundamental changes were called for in the perception of educators as liberators from the

bonds of media servitude. Media education took on an increasingly evolving definition. When the British Film Institute defined the aims of media education as a matter of developing students' understanding of and participation in the media, it enabled "media education to remain contemporary and responsive to students' changing interests and experiences, without becoming merely arbitrary in its selection of material" (Buckingham, 1998, p. 37). Yet, while the industrialized world outside the U.S. moved in a more responsive direction, the American educational system remained subject to certain historic consistencies that subverted a more progressive media education platform.

#### Early Media Literacy in the United States

With the rise of the motion picture, educators in the United States found themselves faced with new competition in the influence of children's minds (Spring, 2005). It was believed that teachers would be unable to compete with a motion pictures vivid images and its appeal to student imaginations. Yet, the movie industry in its effort to avoid government regulation, and expand public markets, chose to contribute its growing medium to the educational efforts of the nation's public schools.

In the 1920's and 1930's the release of the Payne Studies goaded the movie industry into another set of proactive measures. The extensive studies pointed to the perceived effects of motion pictures on viewers. According to the Payne Studies, movies disturbed children's sleep patterns, heightened emotional feelings, influenced social attitudes, caused daydreaming, taught lovemaking, and flooded the mind with ideas and facts that were retained over long periods of time (Spring, 2005, p. 349). In response, the first public school efforts toward early media literacy took the form of the movie appreciation course. Following the prescription of protectionism, it was believed that such courses would encourage students to select movies that had a positive effect on their conduct.

Another important moment in the early efforts to promote what might be called media literacy can be traced to controversies surrounding a 1930's social studies textbook series written by Harold Rugg. The textbook came under fire from the Guardians of American Education and the Advertising Federation of America, claiming it promoted subversive and un-American ideals, which stood against the 'American Way.' A fiery public relations campaign sought to position Rugg and his book as Communist and as a threat to American values. What underlied the commotion was a pragmatic recognition by the advertising industry of the threat posed by a more critical consumer. "Lessons on evaluating advertising were a unique feature of Rugg's books. The advertising industry was concerned because the lessons prepared public opinion to be skeptical of advertising claims" (Spring, 2005, p. 340). These efforts to limit or marginalize potentially critical perspectives on the 'American Way of Life,' with its accompanied unequal distribution of wealth and unquestioned support of business and the market economy, would blossom as the country left the tumultuous depression years behind and entered a booming post-war economy in the late 1940's and 50's (Ewen, 1995, p. 233).

The conflicting interests of a critically conscious public and a growing industry of entertainment and information distribution that relied on a receptive audience for their explicit and implicit messages complicated early Media Literacy efforts within the U.S. The minimal progress that was made during these early years of media education did more to consolidate and fortify the position of the American entertainment industry and media within the national cultural landscape. The public school was no exception. Individuals with hopes of perpetuating their various business interests beyond their own generation recognized the need to selectively educate new generations.

## Modern Media Literacy in the United States

As the United States sought to move ahead with further study into media literacy efforts, efforts were made to gain government financial support for various pilot programs. In the late 1970's, the U.S. government invested a few million dollars in piloting critical viewing curricula through four major grants at the preschool, elementary, middle and high school, and college levels. These projects sparked another politically charged public relations battle, this one spurred by Wisconsin senator William Proxmire. The senator opposed the programs, deeming them wasteful government spending. The initiatives died away within six months of Ronald Reagan's inauguration. Renee Hobbs (1998) suggested that underneath the political jockeying, the 1970's programs were largely unsuccessful because they were not designed with sensitivity to the realities of existing school cultures, the values of particular communities, or the larger context of U.S. public schools (p. 18).

While the establishment of a unified media literacy movement came far easier to other countries, it was not until 1992 that steps were taken to merge the splintered and largely individual media literacy efforts of U.S. educators across the country (Aufderheide, 1993, p. 81). In December of 1992, The Aspen Institute of Communications and Society Program convened twenty-five educators and activists for a National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy. The group worked together to establish a definition, vision, and framework for developing media literacy programs in the U.S. educational system. The conference also established task forces to promote and further its goals (Aufderheide, 1993, p. 79). Taking its cues from efforts established in Canada and Germany, the conference established a test site for media literacy curriculum in New Mexico. The establishment of the New Mexico Media Literacy project, capitalized on the newly written media literacy requirement for public schools in the state. The effort, at the time, was seen as a place to "garner publicity, establish relationships, and build networks" (p. 79). It was from this

unified theory that focused media literacy research began and school districts across the country began to recognize the need for such efforts.

### Summary

As this chapter highlights, media literacy is rooted in the field of media studies. media studies emerged as the world bore witness to the mass media techniques of persuasion and propaganda on display leading up to, and during, World War II. The prevailing psychological and sociological theories of the past one hundred years helped restrict and enrich the way scholars and educators were able to conceive of their role in understanding the vast range of communication technologies that emerged as a dominant cultural participant. Ultimately, the United States lagged behind many Western industrial nations in its efforts to prepare a meaningful media literacy curriculum. Yet, the past thirty years saw a drastic change in the educational landscape surrounding media literacy efforts. Educators and policymakers found a unified voice with which to construct and promote media literacy throughout the country with the hope that such efforts might help forge a new democratic character in the American cultural landscape. These historical trends and developments helped build the academic community within which research and practices have been developed to further the cause of media literacy curriculum. Chapter three will look at these different efforts, and will investigate the most recent research efforts in the field of media literacy.



## CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

Chapter one of this paper outlined the guiding question and limitations for the research; how can a media literacy curriculum help transform the literacy practices of a secondary Language Arts classroom, so that they might meet the shifting demands of a digital communication landscape? The importance of this question lies in the recognition that the way humans communicate and transmit ideas continues to change and evolve as new forms of communication and contact emerge. While certain aspects remain fundamental, the tools of communication continue to shift and evolve. Students entering public school have grown up in a very different world from that of most of their teachers. The way most teachers continue to marginalize and ignore the out-of-school literacy practices of most students highlights this difference. How will teachers prepare students for a world they did not grow up in? There seems the need to bridge this generational gap in a reciprocal way, offering learning potential for students and educators. Ultimately, students will require a voice in helping to shape the reading and writing curriculum of Secondary language arts classes, if those classes are to remain relevant and applicable to the world outside of school.

In Chapter two the history of media studies and media literacy was outlined by looking at the emergence of the academic view of media and its role in culture. Chapter two highlighted the changing needs of an education that might provide citizens with ways to understand and use the media they are surrounded with during a normal day. Yet, despite the changing perceptions and needs of citizens, the United States trailed most Western Industrial countries in their recognition of media literacy as a complex and vital field of critical study in the public school classroom. Over the past thirty years, the once fractured group of U.S. educators and policy makers working to develop media literacy in their own

way have joined together to create a movement. They have encouraged research initiatives and ways to educate those who make decisions on policies for America's public schools.

The following chapter offers a review of the literature surrounding various Media and Popular Culture research topics as they relate to education and the public school classroom. The scope of the research hopes to cover the existing schools of thought surrounding media literacy as well as fields of Political Socialization and Multiple Literacy practices. The research exists to offer suggestions, questions, and possibilities, and for this reason I have sought to pull from as many different sites of study as possible.

First, this chapter looks at current efforts to measure the effects of media literacy integration into the classroom curriculum. The next section will look at the use of digital media production interventions, as well as studies that reflect a protectionist methodology in their theoretical approach to media research. Once a picture of current media literacy practices has been provided, it will be possible to then look into the field of multiple literacies, and the way digital technologies are quickly creating and transforming the fields of literacy and literacy education. This section will draw attention to the ways students practice various forms of literacy outside the classroom. The influence of popular media and culture, as it exists inside and outside the classroom, will be demonstrated next. This chapter will then look at the effects of media on the way teachers perceive their role in the classroom, and how that role effects students and their potential for meaningful learning opportunities. Finally, in an effort to understand the link between media literacy and civic engagement, this chapter will look at the school's role in developing active and engaged citizens. It will also look at the ways researchers define citizenship, and how this definition can hinder or encourage new forms of community and political participation.

## Measuring the Effects of Media Literacy

The publication of the *Aspen Institute Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy* established a unified framework and mission statement for media education and literacy across the country. As a result, calls went out for further research that could be used in defending and promoting the further inclusion of media literacy concepts within school curriculum. A great deal of the ensuing research sought to measure the effects of media literacy initiatives within a variety of national and international contexts.

In presenting its case to the public, policy makers, and school administrators, the research seeks to demonstrate the development of skills that transfer outside the media literacy context. The studies point toward the use of such skills within a more traditional school curriculum. These interventions focus on media literacy in the service of traditional school curriculum. The following studies measure the effects of media literacy within a language arts classroom, a community college setting, primary schools in Haifa, Israel, and the classrooms of four different 9<sup>th</sup> grade teams in a small Massachusetts school. The broad range of ages and cultural contexts helps to demonstrate certain universal qualities and skills fostered by varying media education initiatives.

In their quantitative quasi-experimental study of media literacy instruction, Hobbs and Frost (2003) used a nonequivalent control group design to measure how media literacy instruction, integrated within a yearlong course in high school English language arts, affected the development of students' message comprehension, writing, and critical-thinking skills.

The study measured students' comprehension and message-analysis skills in response to three nonfiction message formats: reading a print newsmagazine article, listening to a U.S. National Public Radio audio news commentary, and viewing a television

news segment targeted at teenagers. Identical pre- and post-tests were administered over a 90-minute period. The test consisted of paper and pencil responses to open-ended questions. The tests were then coded and scored according to criteria established by the researcher. The media literacy curriculum was created and established by teachers at Concord High School, and was being delivered for the first time; it lasted a year.

Measurements were gathered on the entire population of 293 students at Concord High School enrolled in grade 11, and on a random sample of 89 students from a control school, located within a 50-mile radius of the treatment school.

Hobbs and Frost (2003) found that media literacy instruction embedded in a secondary-level English language arts course can be effective in meeting traditional academic goals. The students who received media literacy instruction were more skillful than control-group students at identifying construction techniques used for print news media, audio, and television news. The researchers also found that students receiving the treatment were more likely to recognize the complex blurring of information, entertainment, and economics that are present in contemporary nonfiction media.

The researchers provided a very strong and transparent critique of their own research and related the strengths and weaknesses of the different methods they employed. In terms of controlling for internal validity, the researchers employed a control group to help account for history and maturation, and provided identical pre- and post-test measures seeking to prevent possible instrumentation problems. The researchers provide a great deal of data on their different sample groups. They sought to find a control group that was similar in class, gender, and racial composition. They accounted for experimental mortality by including only students who completed the entire battery of identical pretest and posttest measures. Yet, these factors only provide some evidence for possible generalizability.

The researchers point out that despite their efforts to pair a similar control group with the treatment group, selection bias, or differential selection, remains an obvious threat to the study's generalizability. The researchers also acknowledge the variability that exists with seven teachers teaching over 300 grade 11 students. Individual teachers could influence the reception and teaching of the media literacy instruction. Enthusiasm and teacher efficacy both play a serious role in the classroom environment. The variety of students, and the potentials of their different learning identities creates another set of complications. The different measures of student writing, used to determine their improvement over the course of a year, did not offer a naturalistic setting for writing samples, where students have had time for concept development and revision. As the researchers point out, it is impossible to make generalizations to other instructional contexts.

Given the strengths of the study, a media literacy curriculum integrated into a broader language arts context could potentially improve students' skills in traditional language arts learning practices, as well as in the critical study of media texts. This critical study could be broadened to other print-based texts. The study provides an understanding of ways to link media literacy with state and national standards, and to help convince administrators and the school community of media literacy's place in the curriculum by virtue of its accessibility to a Language Arts setting.

Given the weaknesses of the study, caution should be taken when considering the application of the same media literacy instruction. It seems possible to imagine many different strategies to promote the various skills, while also understanding that teacher efficacy and enthusiasm all play a large role in determining the effectiveness of such interventions. These practices would also require constant regeneration and reimagining in

an effort to maintain a meaningful and relevant set of media artifacts and modalities. Radio newscasts could be exchanged for podcasts, etc.

In an effort to determine how a critical race media literacy curriculum influences Chicana/o community college students, Yosso (2002) used a quantitative one-group pretest/posttest pre-experimental design, alongside qualitative interview methods and multiple data devices. The study sought to measure the experience of 35 Chicana/o community college students as they participated in two sessions of a critical media literacy curriculum, which focused on stereotypes of Chicanas/os from the first half of the twentieth century and stereotypes of Chicana/o students from the second half of the twentieth century.

Students took a presurvey that examined their self-efficacy, socio-academic status, and the frequency and types of roles that they saw Chicanas/os play in English-language entertainment media. Students also responded to video-elicitation items and a casting exercise wherein they chose the race and gender of characters they would like to see in various media portrayals. Following the treatment instruction, students filled out a post survey that included the same items from the presurvey. To conclude the treatment, the students participated in individual interviews that assessed their experiences with and responses to the curriculum. The study took place over one semester.

Yosso (2002) found that the critical media literacy curriculum challenged students not only to question the media images but to also take action to change such portrayals. Students were motivated to change perceptions through their own individual efforts, but it was this 'prove them wrong' attitude, which revealed the lack of understanding regarding systemic racism, and the need to make changes to the system, instead of just themselves. According to the researchers, the curriculum motivated students to defy the odds and succeed in their educational and career goals.

Yosso (2002) employed multiple methods of data collection, resulting in triangulation. They expressed a clear theoretical framework based on Friere's critical literacy process, while providing direct quotes from the participants. The researchers do indicate that their critical media literacy curriculum is not a panacea, and insist that the study simply furthers the discussion about the complexity of media influences. Spending a whole semester in the class suggests a prolonged engagement with the participants. These strengths help contribute to the study's credibility, and transferability.

However, there are several key pieces of information missing from the study, including the questions asked of the students during the end of the semester individual interview, and a detailed breakdown of the participants' gender. The researchers did not perform a participant check, and the study does not account for the effects of each participant's individual history. Because they took the same pre and posttest, it is possible that participants became 'test-wise.' These variables all pose threats to the internal validity of the research.

Given the strengths of the study, and given exposure to critical media literacy, students will have the ability to confront some of the issues surrounding privilege, racism, sexism, classism, and media portrayals (or lack thereof) of these subjects. Yet, students may not necessarily reach a level of critical consciousness, but their schema for inequities in our society will be challenged. If there is a timeline for reaching critical consciousness this might be a place to start. The study also points to the need for prolonged study of media and its influences starting in elementary school and continuing through graduate school. Students should become familiar with their changing media relationships as they grow and develop.

Given the weaknesses of the study, one should remain cautious about using the same media literacy curriculum in any high school context without tailoring the issues to a specific group of students. There are questions of relevance regarding the movies used in

the study. Yet, the study provides a clear next step in terms of encouraging the development of a critical literacy that moves beyond the existing *naïve-critical consciousness*. Yosso (2002) does highlight scenarios teachers might expect to encounter in their efforts to raise a critically conscious classroom.

In the study *Media Literacy in Support of Critical Thinking*, Feuerstein (1999) employed a quantitative pre-post-test research design to test three hypotheses: Pupils who receive media literacy instruction will show greater gains in the continuum of media analysis than their peers who do not receive such instruction; Low and medium level achievement pupils will improve their analytical and critical thinking skills proportionately more than their higher-achievement peers, and as pupils increase their experience with media literacy they will demonstrate greater proportional gains in media analysis and critical thinking skills. Qualitative methods were also used to indicate the reliability of the hypotheses and to check them from differing perspectives.

A total of 273 subjects participated in the study. All subjects were living in Haifa, in northern Israel, at the time of the study. All subjects were children aged 10-12 years in six primary schools. Three schools housed 157 pupils that made up the control group, while three other schools housing 119 pupils comprised the research group. Three classes from each school were involved in the study, with each class having between 20 to 30 pupils. Both the control and research groups represented three kinds of socio-economic levels: medium-high, medium, and low medium.

Both the control and treatment groups were given a pre and post text language and media test developed by an Australian Research group. The tests were adapted to local Israeli media texts. The language test was based on newspaper ads and the narrative test on opening extracts of popular television series. Subjects first viewed the video extracts for six minutes and then viewed the same a second time after having read the questions. In



addition to the quantitative testing measures, Feuerstein compiled class observations in media literacy activities, interviews with media teachers, and a focus group with pupils from the research group.

The research groups studied a media literacy program for 1-2 hours a week out of a total of 30 classroom hours. Their teacher had been specially trained and worked under supervision of a media literacy specialist. The control group had a different teacher and did not participate in a media literacy program and studied the regular school curriculum. The two groups were tested after a two-month summer recess in order to measure the retention and application of their critical media skills in a situation remote from formal study contexts.

Feuerstein (1999) found that an intervention program supported by systematic teacher mediation encouraged pupils from low and medium school achievement to reflect on their work and to improve their negotiation of meaning to a greater extent than their highly achieving counterparts. The researchers found that a specific teacher's implementation of a media production section of the curriculum significantly affected the overall outcomes. The combined strategy of teaching video production groups in small-group environment, engaging in multi-faceted tasks which demanded from the students a defense of the choices they made from the wide variety of available options, and dealing with creative solutions to multi-dimensional problems- appeared to best nurture the thinking skills found in every stage of a child's development.

Through the use of a control group, Feuerstein sought to counter possible threats to internal validity. The effects of history and maturation were controlled through the use of the control group, while issues raised by testing were countered with the identical pre- and post-test given to both the treatment and control groups. Feuerstein helps build a stronger set of results by employing qualitative research measures to further explain and confirm

evidence offered by the quantitative testing measures. The ecological validity of the study is helped by the conscious effort of the researchers to deliver the post-test after the two month summer break, thus helping to ensure they were measuring retention and use of the material outside the immediate context of school. The researchers were transparent about the issues that might seek to affect the internal validity or ecological validity of the study.

The researchers fail to offer any evidence that the possible differences in pedagogy found amongst the different classes, both treatment and control, were controlled for. Differential selection remains a threat to internal validity as the control and treatment groups were not selected randomly. There is no talk about the potential for experimental mortality to play a part in the final results: therefore, it should remain another possible threat to the study's internal validity. The generalizability of the study is difficult to gauge given the international nature of the classrooms and the possible differences in media texts. The growth and development of international media literacy initiatives have generally outpaced those in the United States, so it is possible this may have an effect on the contact students have had with the subject as they make their way through different educational institutions in Israel. The "experimenter effect" could also play a strong part in the potential for generalizability, as the quality of the teachers administering the treatment, or the control classrooms, could have had a great effect on the results.

Given the strengths of the study, it is possible to infer that media literacy, when delivered during an early high school age range, can possibly improve the engagement and performance of lower and middle achieving students. In working with the teacher, students who fall in these categories have a greater chance to have their learning needs met by a newer approach to classroom practices. Media literacy has demonstrated in other studies its potential to support the development of critical thinking skills. This study also confirms the need to join the theoretical investigation of media with the production of media texts in

an effort to provide a more genuine understanding of media and its creation. Media literacy might also help to improve the thinking abilities of students through the active use of media languages.

Despite the weaknesses of the study, other research has produced similar results. It is possible support the above conclusions, yet this study exists in a setting outside the United States. There is no way to account for the divergent media environments that exist in different countries, and how those media environments might shape students in different countries in different ways.

Using a qualitative case study that employs a quantitative post-test only non-experimental measure of student comprehension, knowledge, and skills, Frost and Hobbs (1998) sought to explore what kinds of classroom practices build particular media literacy skills. The researchers also wanted to understand what styles of instruction best support students' ability to engage in critical analysis of media texts.

The researchers offer their case study that documents the instructional practices developed by teachers in a single grade level in one school district. Four groups and their efforts to integrate media literacy curriculum were documented with each group demonstrating a different approach and sense of efficacy with the concepts. Teachers who participated in a staff development in media literacy designed the approaches alongside their colleagues. The measurement strategy, which quantitatively measured student knowledge and skills, was adopted from a Western Australian approach. Students were provided with a particular media text, and were instructed to answer a set of questions administered via paper and pencil. The measures were designed to determine students' ability to identify author and purpose, point of view, target audience, strategies to attract attention, techniques used to convey mood and tone, and other basic media analysis tasks,

focusing particularly on textual analysis. The instrument was administered over two days, and students were given thirty minutes to complete the items.

Four teacher teams were studied with one of the four teams originally designated as a control group that would not employ any media literacy curriculum in their classrooms. Yet, it was discovered that the teacher team included some media literacy efforts in response to certain events and concerns within the district. Thus no control group existed within this study. The classes of 9th graders were randomly assigned to membership in one of the four groups. Nearly the entire population of 15 year olds in the small Massachusetts school district were from a middle-class community of 10,000 residents with a large retirement community and residents who depend on the seasonal tourist economy for their livelihood. 90% of the ninth grade population in the school district was assessed during the data collection period. The 'Plaid' group remained an uncontrollable variable. Only half of the 60 students were actually assessed and, because of scheduling, the classroom make-up consisted of students enrolled in band, but no students from a transitional math.

The case study presents evidence that media literacy initiatives which attempt to reach large numbers of students in a school district may depend on the leadership and facilitation by a dedicated individual, but that a program of staff development plus support and enthusiasm from a large number of faculty is essential as well. A teacher's sense of familiarity, comfort, and sense of efficacy with the media and media literacy content also determines many of the ways such curriculum is approached in the classroom. The case study also highlights the variability in approaches and reasons for integrating media literacy into a classroom. The quantitative data revealed that students' media literacy skills were highest for those students participating in a program of instruction where media education activities are integrated across all subject areas, where teacher-generated activities and materials were used, where explicit connections were developed across

subject areas, where both analysis and production activities were included, and where explicit instruction in various genres was included. Simply exploring the issues of violence or substance abuse in the media in a short set of lesson plans using off-the-shelf curricula did not appear to develop effective analysis skills.

Frost and Hobbs (1998) are fairly transparent about the shortcomings and issues involving their study. They present a strong theoretical position, while utilizing a clear instrument of measure for understanding student media knowledge and skills. They provide detailed descriptions of teacher practices among the four different groups, and present an account of the different events that led to the fourth group abandoning the position as the control group. The results of their case study are credible when compared with results from previous research (Hobbs, 2006).

Despite the shortcomings of the research, Frost and Hobbs (2005) are clear in their purpose; "Because of the limitations of the research design, the evidence from this study is best understood as a strategy for hypothesis formulation" (p. 352). They do not offer any details about how they collected the case study descriptions and information. The lack of a control group presents complications and issues of internal validity. The aforementioned Plaid group presents an interesting dilemma where selection bias may have been out of the researchers' control. The Plaid group created issues in data collection, presenting only half of the group in the final data collection measure. The researchers also face the issue of teachers and the struggle to control for differences in teaching strategies. Given these reasons, the generalizability of this research is limited.

As this study highlights, media literacy is not just protectionism and a combating of violence in the media. As much of the literature has suggested, a focus on protectionism, and helping students defend themselves from alcohol and tobacco advertising, is ineffective and a disservice. The media is a much more complicated and pervasive part of our thinking and

our lives. Relegating a media literacy education to such a limited scope should be avoided. Teacher training and staff development should draw a great deal of focus in any effort to improve media education in schools. If a teacher feels uncomfortable with the material, they will be ineffective in their efforts. A sense of self-efficacy with the material cannot be underestimated in its effects on student learning and achievement in the media studies. An educator's understanding of media literacy will also provide a greater opportunity for more meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

The research presented here seeks to demonstrate the potential of media literacy curriculum to inform the mediated experiences of students while providing transferable skills that can help improve their traditional literacy and reading practices. There is evidence for the improvement of textual analysis and critical thinking about media texts. From these three studies it is possible to move forward and imagine the possibilities that a curriculum informed by media literacy principles can create in attempting to connect student worlds with the classroom world.

#### Media Production and Multimodal Design

The next section of studies looks at a body of research that has sought to chronicle and understand the emerging production abilities of youth as multimodal designers. Instead of limiting students to a traditional definition of writing and text, Sadik (2008), Walsh (2007) and Bruce (2008) have sought to expand their approach to student writing by utilizing what Lessig (2008) has identified as *remixing*, where students are able to employ existing texts in a new way, while retaining elements of the original text, and multimodal design. Adding to this body of research which specifically addresses the mixing of design and writing, Lynch (2007) offers another angle on how such efforts might help the promotion of arts education, even as it fights for survival in many under-funded schools around the country. Ultimately, multimodal design and media production skills begin a

different debate regarding how technology should be integrated into public schools. Given that most public schools lack the budget to stay on the cutting edge with the newest technologies, how should schools go about preparing students in ways that allow them to adapt to the changing landscapes of human communication and interaction? What are the essential skills and ways of thinking students will need to develop?

In studying digital storytelling, Sadik (2008) sought to answer three main questions. First, to what extent can students be engaged in authentic learning tasks with digital storytelling? Second, How effective is a digital storytelling approach in supporting teachers to effectively integrate technology into learning? Finally, What are the teachers' concerns and views regarding the implementation and integration of digital storytelling into learning? To answer these questions, the researcher developed an observational study that employed quantitative and qualitative instruments, including digital story evaluation rubric, integration of technology observation instruments and interviews for evaluating the effectiveness of digital storytelling into learning.

One class of approximately 35-45 13-15 year olds from private Basic Education Schools in Qena, Egypt, learned to integrate digital storytelling into the curriculum during the second semester. Students and Teachers used Photo Story, a non-linear application that can be used in the creation of classroom digital stories. Students were divided into small groups, and students brainstormed the story topic they would like to do based on the curriculum. Each group was asked to bring or collect pictures from home or the web. Students were encouraged to storyboard and develop scripts, while cooperating throughout each phase of the project. Students were allowed three days to complete the activities.

The researchers found that students performed well on the projects, and their stories met many of the pedagogical and technical attributes of digital stories. Yet, the study did identify a group of students who might not benefit from a digital storytelling lesson;

fewer numbers of groups provided clear evidence of connection between the objectives of their stories and the objectives of the subject matter. The researchers found that there was no clear evidence that students worked collaboratively in preparing their stories. The only drawback found in the lesson in terms of supporting teachers to effectively integrate technology into their classroom, was that teachers were not technically proficient in the use of the technology, and could not explain all of the technical and organizational procedures to the students. The teachers viewed the integration of digital storytelling as a positive and productive classroom practice, but worried about the time dedicated to learning about the different programs and technology.

Depending on the objectives of a lesson integrating technology, this study points to the possible dilemmas in attempting to initiate group work. Because each student needs to learn about the program and to be able to use it, there might be some difficulty in getting students to work collaboratively right away. For these reasons, the study lacks generalizability. On top of that, the study seems to be focused on simple description, informing the results with qualitative interview questions. Of course, the type of classroom and the general methods of the teacher might have prevented the group work aspect of the study to be fully realized.

The researchers performed triangulation across multiple sources. This study demonstrated the use of media and technology in terms of both students and teachers. The researchers recognized the relevance and importance of the teacher's role in providing the opportunity to approach these types of integrated lessons. The study does point to a greater motivation and personal engagement on the students' part, and suggests that with digital storytelling, different modes of writing can be investigated in a way that might appeal to a broader range of students.



Sadik (2008) highlights a necessary component in the success of a media literacy or multiple literacies focus within a curriculum. Ultimately, much may depend on the teacher's willingness to engage and understand the mediums the class will be working in. This study points toward the relevance of storytelling in creating these media projects. Students have the ability to generalize their practices of storytelling into new modes and contexts. They can also utilize visuals and animation in their stories. The effort of students in creating these projects also indicates a possible level of revived engagement with the different tools necessary for creating a multimodal production.

It remains to be seen whether certain cultural differences might affect the studies outcome. The Egyptian population is not necessarily generalizable to an American classroom. This places limits on the broader implications of the study beyond this one context. Without further information about education and schooling in Egypt, it would be difficult to imagine the same scenarios for classroom production.

Walsh (2007) performed a qualitative auto-ethnography of 58 student-generated websites and online portfolios from two humanities classes to determine how teacher and student literacy practices shift when the progressive literacy workshop is replaced with a multiliteracies curriculum that emphasizes the concept of 'multimodal design.' Walsh drew on narratives of critical incidents of auto-ethnography, collective memory, student interviews and multimodal document collection. Students designed and maintained online portfolios with individual and group design work while investigating the Dust Bowl and the Harlem Renaissance. Additional data was collected through the class web-hub, posts on the class discussion boards, individual and group WebQuests, individual website assignments, blogs and emails. 17 websites were designed by females and 25 designed by males. Seven specific websites were examined in this particular article.

Walsh (2007) found that by creating a space within the classroom to recognize and promote imagination and creativity, students were encouraged to engage in multimodal design to re-represent curricular knowledge. Students became ingenious inventors/designers of new genres, and created new texts and forms of meaning through working individually and in groups. Different student-generated websites demonstrated their understanding of content and narrative structure.

The researcher employs a solid theoretical foundation for the study's rationale. He provides a strong qualitative description of specific student work, and provides evidence for their engagement and growing multimodal design proficiency as individuals and as a community. Through his personal perspective he presented examples of hybrid designs, drawing on a vast range of available designs and digital proficiencies. The websites used images to engage and present a story. Student designers directed viewer attention and allowed them to make decisions on their interactions with the site. The findings do contain a certain degree of dependability, considering that the perspective of youth as advanced multimodal designers aligns with other studies performed on similar literacy competencies. Because the findings are based upon a study of actual websites and student products, it seems reasonable to ascribe a level of credibility.

In his evaluation of student work, the author presents assumptions regarding student intent and design without input from the actual students. This creates a situation where the reader has no choice but to let the author speak for the students. Student intention might be reinforced if evidence had been provided from an interview. The researcher fails to present any evidence of member checking, which could have provided the necessary check on the researcher's perspective and findings. Transferability is difficult to discern considering the school is described as well resourced, and the teachers have been given a level of autonomy that allowed the integration of this multiple literacy approach

within the regular curriculum. The absence of these conditions in other schools with different student populations cannot necessarily be expected to produce similar findings.

Walsh (2007) presents a concrete application of media literacy, along with the adoption of multimodal literacy practices in the classroom. By employing different methods of production, students used media and multimodal literacies as a means of creation, and as a way to create their own voice. There are also elements of a critical lens with which to view media as one becomes more familiar with the domain and its language. The researcher offers evidence of critical student engagement with the uncovering of gaps and silences in their history textbooks. It is this critical engagement that should be sought within a media literacy infused curriculum.

In *Visualizing Literacy: Building Bridges with Media*, Bruce (2008) performed a qualitative teacher-research study looking at the following question: To what extent do lower-achieving students engage with complex composition strategies, particularly when composing a video project in the context of a media-based language arts elective? The study took place in an affluent Midwestern suburban high school. The article looks specifically at one self-selected all-male group, consisting of three seniors and one junior: Craig with a 2.5 GPA (and an IEP stating his need for additional time with writing assignments), Eddie with a 2.4 GPA, Tom with a 2.8 GPA, and Michael with a 2.2 GPA. They were the least self-initiating group of the 13 separate production teams in the two Communications classes participating in the assignment.

Students were required to select a song for which they would compose the visuals in the format of a music video. Students would select a song for which they would create a storyboard, a shot list of potential footage they would shoot, raw video footage, scripting of raw footage, and editing the video on a digital video editing program. A dual emphasis was placed on composing and reading.

Bruce (2008) employed surveys addressing students and their affinity toward and capabilities with print and media. Retrospective Think-Aloud Protocols were used on audio taped production group meetings. Six class periods were videotaped at times when they were making critical decisions; interviews were conducted with 17 students (including each member of the sample group). Finally, a teacher research journal allowed the researcher to contextualize the other data based on the documented narrative timeline. Data was collected over one semester of a yearlong course.

Bruce (2008) utilizes Peter Smagorinsky's definition of composition. The definition contains six main points, which the author proceeds to use in offering specific qualitative data confirming the students' participation in each specific ritual. The author identifies two main implications for the findings of his research. The first involves reconsidering the intelligence of those students who normally do not fare well in traditional classroom settings. The second implication speaks to how we define and value forms of composition in the English language arts classroom.

Unlike a previous study that looked at student multimedia work, this researcher included a great deal of information and evidence that comes straight from students. Bruce (2008) transcribed conversations, and outlined the different activities they took part in while discussing their projects. The researcher performed triangulation across multiple data sources, which helped inform the study in a deeper way. There is transparency about the coding methods used to discover emergent themes among student responses to surveys and interviews. It is this transparency, which adds to the credibility of this study.

The researcher does not provide any evidence of member checking. Yet, there is a level of dependability, as the findings do mirror those from previous studies dealing with multimodal design and youth struggling in the traditional school context. Because this study was performed in an affluent suburban neighborhood, it is difficult to imagine the same

resources being available in every school across the country. The participant group in this study is also only a small sample, and is missing any female subjects. This poses issues with the study's transferability.

Yet, as Bruce (2008) indicates, for students who struggle with writing, working in alternate mediums may help build confidence in expressing thoughts about a text. Also, the skills acquired in a multimedia project, may serve as scaffolding for more formal literary and writing adventures. Bruce make reference to student understanding of transitions in writing once the context of transitions in video production was understood. While the resources of the school accounted for student access to the specific elective, the skills students were able to work on and experiment with would prove transferable to other more traditional Language Arts contexts.

While Lynch's (2007) qualitative case study of an elementary school's arts-integrated curriculum may appear out of place among more secondary focused research pursuits, the link between the previous multimodal projects and artistic creation/expression can not be overlooked. In the study, *Making Meaning Many Ways: An Exploratory Look at Integrating the Arts with Classroom Curriculum*, Lynch addresses her observations toward two main questions: What do arts-integrated lessons look and sound like? How is meaning making supported and/or constrained through integrated arts activities? It is this question of supporting meaning making that connects specifically with the previous pursuits of multimodal design and student production.

Over a 4-week period the researcher observed 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students as they engaged in arts integrations. The researcher talked with the students about their work, listened to their conversations, and watched the decisions they made. Interviews were conducted with the principal and all four arts teachers to gather information about the school's history, and to gain their perspectives on the arts' impact on student learning.

Lynch (2007) performed the observations at The Arts Academy, an urban K-5 magnet school located in the southeastern United States. It is a Title I school whose student population consists of approximately 450 children from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The study highlights the possibility of supporting every child when the arts works in concert with classroom content to enhance the creation and expression of meaning. Weaving the arts throughout the regular classroom curriculum supports learning in several ways, including the possibility of allowing multiple perspectives, offering pleasurable learning experiences and providing a safe environment where risks could be taken.

There is evidence of triangulation, as the researcher relies on a range of qualitative data compiled from both students and faculty at the school. The researcher makes clear her theoretical perspective involving arts curriculum. Yet, there remain questions of prolonged and substantial engagement, along with a perceived lack of persistent observation. Four weeks does not seem like a substantial amount of time. Authenticity also appears suspect as the author fails to offer evidence of any peer debriefing or member-checking, which creates questions involving progressive subjectivity. Because this study was performed at an arts magnet school, it seems that questions could arise regarding the transferability of these findings to a public school setting.

Based on this study and other studies investigating the value of arts curriculum, it is possible to conclude that the arts can be a valuable tool in creating meaningful investigations into media literacy. The arts can help identify the ways media affects our lives. In a public school setting, and within a language arts classroom, the question remains; will the regular curriculum allow for a rich investigation of art and media? It may be through the use of multimodal design and media production efforts that students will be able to employ their artistic sensibilities while engaging in a variety of literacy practices.

This study helps confirm the need for the active creation of media messages in any media literacy curriculum.

The studies included in this section highlight the need to engage students with the actual production of media texts. Often, the skills they are able to develop within a media production project can be applied to more traditional reading and writing practices of a Language Arts classroom. These production efforts also create the conditions under which students can use their own media creations as texts for deconstruction. They will be able to reflect on the production process, and attempt to view this process from the position of a larger media generating entity.

#### Mediating Media via Protectionism

While the following two studies present two different media literacy interventions, they both deal with younger children. They contribute to the debate through their findings, and the attention paid to establishing a more critical stance toward media at an earlier age. Ultimately, these studies are more concerned with a protectionist approach to media, an approach that would be misguided as the students get older, and they reveal some interesting methods for measuring and observing different responses to the interventions.

Comer, et al (2008) studied parental influence on a child's anxiety over televised news reports on terrorism. The researchers used a quantitative true experiment design, with a pretest posttest control group design while tracking two independent variables. The participants were randomly selected amongst a purposeful population of mothers who allowed their children to view televised news reports. The participants were randomly assigned to the different groups. The questions guiding the study include: What are the associations between televised news regarding risk for future terrorism and children's anxiety and threat perceptions? What are the effects of training mothers in an empirically

based approach, coping and media literacy (CML), to addressing such news content with their children?

Ninety youth from the Philadelphia area and their mothers participated in the study. Forty-eight percent Caucasian, 48% African-American, and 4% were reported as “other.” Participants had to be English speaking, and the mothers were screened to make sure they allowed their child to watch the televised news. Mother-child dyads together viewed a selected televised news clip about risk of future terrorism. This clip was selected by 4 child anxiety experts as most likely to elevate children’s anxiety, without resulting in extended distress.

Threat perceptions were assessed at pre-clip, post-clip, and post-discussion periods. In one group, mothers were trained in coping and media literacy, and were given the opportunity to discuss the news clip with their child. The next group of mothers were trained in the same CML program but were urged to avoid talking to their child after the clip. The final group was instructed to act as they normally would at home. The researchers measured child state of anxiety using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for children. Child Threat perceptions were measured by asking the children to rate the likelihood of future terror attacks on 7-point Likert scales. Maternal state of anxiety was measured using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. Maternal Threat Perception was measured by asking the mothers to provide two percentages indicating their subjective estimation of likelihood of future terror attacks.

Children of CML-trained mothers exhibited lower threat perceptions following viewing of the terrorism-related news clip than did children of mothers encouraged to be themselves. Giving the mothers strategies for discussing the news with their children helped them cope with the news. Training mothers in CML resulted in lower maternal



threat perceptions and state anxiety following news exposure and a discussion period than did encouraging mothers to be themselves when reacting to the news.

The researchers sought to account for the two independent variables by isolating the post-news clip mother-child conversation in the third group to make sure the findings could be applied to the intervention. The researchers accounted for the threat of history to the internal validity of the study in their cohort effects check section. The random sample sought by the researcher's provided a wide range of participants who represented a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

It has been said that, the more perfect an experiment, the further removed from reality it is. This seems to hold true for the study. It does not seem that these tests can accurately represent the home environment. As the study points out, DAU mothers spent 60 minutes reflecting on what they would do if the topic of terrorism were to emerge. This kind of advanced warning seems to downplay the immediacy of mother-child interaction, and fails to account for contact that takes place throughout television watching. It situates the 'control' mothers to their task of addressing the news story.

This study indicates the possible benefits of experiencing media in social environment where media is critiqued and discussed during and after the experience. This discussion encourages the critical engagement of the media, and still allows it to retain some of its personal entertainment value. The study also provides a strong example of the influence of news reports on consumer's perceptions of the world around them.

Austin and Johnson (1997a) explored the effects of both a general and alcohol-specific media literacy intervention on children's perceptions and future decision-making regarding alcohol. Specifically, the study tested a range of hypothesis; it sought to test a general media literacy intervention against an intervention that specifically addresses decision making for alcohol portrayals. The study also sought to test whether children

generalize the skills learned in a nonspecific media literacy program to the more specific context of alcohol advertising. The final question the researchers sought to understand: To what extent will girls and boys respond differently to the general and specific training methods?

A convenience sample of 225 third graders from Roseville, Minnesota, randomly assigned to six groups participated in a quantitative Solomon randomized four group (quasi)-experiment with two levels of the treatment factor. The design was a 2 (control v. treatment) X 2 (general v. specific) X 2 (pretest v. no pretest) design. The 225 participants were randomly assigned to six different groups: (a) pretest, general treatment, posttest; (b) general treatment, posttest; (c) pretest, posttest only; (d) posttest only; (e) pretest, specific treatment, posttest; and (f) specific treatment, posttest. The pretest was given one month (Feb.) before the interventions were performed. The critical viewing manipulations took place in March, along with an immediate posttest. A delayed posttest took place in May.

The training began with a video designed to teach skepticism toward advertising. In the general media literacy condition, samples of food and drink commercials were shown and critiqued. In the alcohol-specific condition, two samples of advertising for beer products were shown and critiqued. The children then received a posttest nearly identical to the pretest, with the addition of some critical viewing knowledge questions added as a manipulation check and an extended behavioral measure tested as a methodological refinement. In the treatment groups, a guided discussion followed the videos, focusing on the importance of questioning what on television is real, what on television is right or wrong, and how what is seen relates to their real-life experiences. In the control conditions, students viewed an age-appropriate video that included advertisements for both alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages and food items that included some clips in common with the general and specific treatment tapes. A discussion following the video focused on the video,

rather than on the advertisements. To measure the predrinking behavior of the participants, researchers measured the children's choice of an alcohol or nonalcoholic themed product. Children were shown a variety of equivalent products with either beer labels or soda pop labels.

The researchers found that a media literacy training program for children as young as third grade can reduce expectancies and the propensity toward an unhealthy behavior, in this case underage alcohol use, by affecting children's decision-making processes. They also illustrate that some of the positive effects of such training may be indirect or delayed because of the way changes filter through the decision-making process. The results also suggest that both general and context-specific training can have benefits, with treatment explicitly addressing portrayals specific to the context somewhat more effective than general critical viewing training. Lastly, the results point to the importance of considering gender sensitivity, as well as developmental appropriateness, in message design. The researchers also indicated the possibility that critical viewing training can act as decision-making retraining, in effect, by creating a logical link in the process that did not exist before.

The researchers sought to control for the Hawthorne effect through their rigorous design, and sought to eliminate those effects as an explanation for group differences on the dependent variables. Austin and Johnson controlled for history by performing the intervention on a single day. Their use of a post-test and a delayed post-test gave a potentially more complete picture of the effects of the intervention.

The behavior measure that sought to represent future alcohol use among children not yet ready or able to use alcohol appears highly questionable. How can a child's preference of a beer logo over a soda label indicate their future preference for alcohol and behaviors related to social norms surrounding alcohol? The seemingly endless numbers of individual preferences for color and other variables seems particularly challenging to the

chosen behavior measure. The researchers also indicate the relatively small sample size and their use of a purposive sample as barriers to the studies generalizability. The researchers fail to provide any detailed description of their sample group posing a threat to internal validity via differential selection. There is no evidence of controlling for the novelty or disruption effect. The researchers do not seem to account for the individuals who participated in the discussion with the students, providing a threat to generalizability in the form of the experimenter effect.

Along with Comer, et al. (2008) there is significant evidence for employing media literacy efforts at all ages. The two studies provide a strong defense of using an approach to media that encourages discussion and deconstruction. Like a book or any other text, gathering more perspectives offers the opportunity to challenge and further the students' understandings. While most individuals are actively engaging with media when they consume it, the push for a more critical eye demands even further discussion. Classrooms offer the perfect forum for discussing media, the media economy, and the political implications of media.

These studies demonstrate a limited effectiveness of narrow media literacy efforts within select school environments. Given their protectionist stance toward media literacy, these studies prevent a clear understanding of what can be accomplished when one determines to no longer view different media as good or bad, questionable versus culturally valuable. The researchers reveal more about their own subjectivities and beliefs than they do about their subjects. They consistently refer to helping students 'protect' or 'defend' themselves against the harmful effects of media. At the end of the study they even refer to the need to "inoculate" students, framing their research within a particular media literacy perspective that might prove ineffective as students get older and enter high school. It also situates the students in school as helpless individuals blindly pursuing what sits directly in

front of them while ignoring the wider cultural and political implications of these media texts.

### Understanding Out-of-School Literacies and Multiliteracies

As technology and mediated experience continue to develop, the concept of literacy undergoes an evolution. New forms of meaning making are made available to individuals. In light of these developments, media literacy struggles to maintain a unified perspective. Students are growing up immersed in these new environments, and thus have a whole range of skills and understandings that newcomers and researchers are just now beginning to comprehend and chronicle. For any approach to media literacy to serve the students in meaningful ways, educators must first understand the skills students already possess and bring into the classroom. These so-called “out-of-school” literacies may not necessarily have a place in the school curriculum, but they do open up new possibilities for meaningful learning opportunities. Understanding the role these various literacy practices play in student lives allows educators to imagine new ways of connecting students with classroom content.

The following research seeks to chronicle and understand existing and emerging literacies as they are acted out beyond the sanctioned school realm/curriculum. These studies offer only a glimpse at the spectrum of literacy practices acted out by students on a daily basis, yet they help create a picture that indicates the need for changing approaches to media literacy, and literacy education as a whole.

Foehr, Rideout, and Roberts (2005) offer a comprehensive view of media use among 8 to 18 year-olds. Their study, funded through the Kaiser Foundation, seeks to answer a wide range of questions, all in an effort to understand *Generation M*. The researchers wanted to know, which media young people use? The duration of use, with whom they use media, where the kids use media, what media genres or activities they prefer, what roles, if

any, govern their use of media, what their home media environment is like, What relationships exist, if any, between their use of various media and their relations with their parents, the grades they get, their overall contentedness, and the amount of time they spend with other media and in other activities such as homework or exercise?

A quantitative study was performed, employing the survey method. 2,032 3<sup>rd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students ages 8-18, including an oversample of African American and Hispanic students participated in a self-administered written questionnaire in the classroom. The sample included students from public, private, parochial schools. Data from the survey was weighted to ensure a nationally representative sample of students. Trained interviewers were present in each classroom to provide assistance if needed. The survey instrument was completely anonymous. In addition to the surveys, 694 respondents completed seven-day media use diaries, which were used to help guide the survey analyses.

The findings cover a wide range of media related topics. Highlights include, the revelation that students are increasingly becoming media multi-taskers, as they engage in multiple media activities at one time. According to the study, and looking at the change in results since the last study on kids' media use, while the amount of time spent with media remains consistent, the regular time measurement does not necessarily account for the media multitasking. In accounting for the use of multiple media at one time, it is estimated that kids spend an average of around 8 and a half hours a day with media.

The study also concludes that the Internet and computers are quickly becoming a universal presence in young people's lives. Participants also experience access to a wide range of media in the home, and easy access indicates greater use. The researchers found that the use of so-called 'old' media does not necessarily decline with greater use of 'new' media. Young people who use the most media tend to spend more time with their parents, being physically active, and pursuing other hobbies. This finding also indicates that

spending time with media, like the television, may be the way families tend to spend time together. Finally, there is evidence that while the amount of time spent watching TV has not necessarily been affected by greater use of the Internet, the nature of television watching has undergone a transformation as more and more young people spend time in online spaces related to the television programs they view.

Most findings are attached to measurable data. To prevent any issues with the possibility of an underrepresented group, the researchers included an oversample of African American and Hispanic students. The study covers many different angles, and provides a complex description and view of media, and the ways it can enter a child's life. The study provides a handy reference point in terms of referencing the 1999 Kaiser Foundation study on media, which provides an historical lens with which to measure these current findings. The use of the qualitative media diaries filled out by close to 700 participants also adds to the significance of the data. The sample is wide enough and large enough to suggest generalizability.

The assumption is made that answers to a questionnaire are accurate. It is assumed that students are able to accurately account for their daily media use. Some of the conclusions drawn, or findings made, seem to go beyond the data, and should be viewed with skepticism: "This generation is largely happy and well-adjusted, but those who are least content or get poorer grades spend more time with video games and less time reading than their peers" (Foehr, Rideout, and Roberts, 2008, p. 24). The researchers fail to describe their criteria for establishing someone as 'happy' and 'well-adjusted.'

The data serves as a starting point in thinking about the amount and density of adolescent media use. The amount of use provides a quantitative justification for media literacy, and a curriculum that seeks to utilize, develop, and critically understand the skills

employed in daily media interaction. Yet, this study does not offer the complete picture that could be found in a more specific set of qualitative data.

Having gained an understanding of what the daily interaction with media might look like by the numbers, the next logical step would be to consult the actual users of the media. Damico and Fuller (2008) seek to provide educators with a better understanding of how adolescents view their own media use and the possible impact of these thoughts and attitudes on their daily lives. Their qualitative ethnography utilizes semi-structured interviews to perform a grounded study of adolescent perspectives on media use and health choices. Participants included students from five required health classes at a New England urban, economically and racially diverse high school. Participants were 21 sophomores and juniors, 11 boys and 10 girls between the ages of 15 and 17 years.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. The questions were based on previous health-literature studies examining the potential influence of the media on health behaviors and conversations with students involving their media use. The researchers provided all students with a written explanation of the project and required them to return a parental consent form.

Themes that emerged from the study included: Participants frequently felt the media was an influencing factor in certain health behaviors, but felt that this risk applied to others, and not themselves. Participants also felt that their parents had a limited understanding of current media, and were ineffective in supervising their media use. Participants expressed guilty pleasure in their media use, yet they also stated that media use was an effective emotional outlet. There was a belief in the strong link between media exposure and gender representations and sex in the media.

The researchers outline their theoretical perspective, while providing a clear description of the data collecting procedures. Damico and Fuller (2008) also breakdown



their process of data analysis rather effectively, while providing many examples of ways to apply the information collected during the interviews toward further empowering students in their efforts to become critical media viewers. The article also provides some strong points of debate that should lead into new areas of research.

Damico and Fuller (2008) do not break down the make-up of their participant group. Because they seem to rely on one source of data, the research lacks any evidence of triangulation. The researchers also fail to provide any evidence of member checking. It is difficult to judge the dependability of the study without other studies that address youth and their perceptions of their own media use. The Transferability of this study remains ambiguous. It is difficult to decide on what role their health curriculum, or the curriculum of their general school studies might influence their perceptions of media use and health related aspects.

The themes in student response help identify areas where a media literacy/multiliteracies curriculum might need to focus. Issues of their own susceptibility to media influence, and the ways they might investigate constructed ideas of sexuality and gender roles could offer great places to focus a critical eye in media studies. In some ways, students possess the critical faculties needed to begin the critique of media in their lives, yet they consider themselves out of the range of influence. Educators can use this to develop a more critical self-reflection on the student's own experience.

Understanding the findings of Damico and Fuller (2008) highlights the need to connect students to their existing literacy practices in new ways. Yet, educators must first understand these practices. Donna Alvermann (2001), in *Reading Adolescent's Reading Identities: Looking Back to See Ahead*, began by offering her rationale for engaging in a critical study of her own constructions of the term *struggling reader*.

My purpose in writing this article is to read...some of the reading identities ascribed to, and taken up by, adolescents who struggle with school literacy tasks. I want to look at assumptions underlying the construction of struggling readers...to use this retrospective glance as a way of thinking about where we might head in the future, as enablers of youth and their literacies. (p. 677)

She performed a qualitative, single-participant case study, in which the lone subject was Grady, an African American boy in the ninth grade who (at the time of the study) was reading at the fifth-grade level.

Observations were collected during an after-school media club study involving 30 adolescents in grades 7-9. Alvermann (2001) includes direct quotes from face-to-face interactions that were recorded during the club meetings, and from email correspondence that took place outside the media club context.

While Alvermann (2001) worked within specific assumptions early in her work with Grady, she found those assumptions to be misguided and limiting in her efforts to help connect Grady's reading identity with culturally constructed 'capable' reading identities. She constructed Grady as a struggling reader, and was unconsciously subscribing to a deprivation approach in thinking about culture and disability. Grady possessed a reading identity that existed outside the institutional reading identity, which labeled him a remedial reader in the eyes of the researchers.

Alvermann (2001) performed an extensive study of her own assumptions, responses, and reactions during her work with Grady. She offered three different theoretical lenses with which to view the case study. She also offered realistic suggestions and uses for the study. She provided evidence of peer consultation, along with consulting the observations of her fellow researchers while working with Grady.

Alvermann's (2001) case study is limited. With only one participant, the transferability possibilities are small. The study offers potentials and possibilities with which to view future encounters with students who have been constructed as struggling readers. On top of the study's limited scope, the researcher did not perform any member checking with Grady. There does not appear to be any effort on Alvermann's part to perform any triangulation with her initial data.

From this case study, one can see that the social construction of the struggling reader identity is a dangerous concept that can lead to detrimental teacher perceptions of students who might be constructed within this identity. The study presents valuable approaches for teachers who might choose to move beyond these generalized and institutional perceptions of reading practices. As the research demonstrates, students read and write outside of class, but these reading and writing practices can be made marginal, or ignored, in the general classroom. Alvermann (2001) also offers a great model for using different theoretical lenses as one attempts to understand different classroom situations. The study provides a great example of a teacher who is able to look reflexively and critically upon her own actions within the classroom. Still, one should remain cautious about using the same techniques, or applying the same perceptions of Grady to other students in the classroom.

Alvermann's work helps investigate the issues of in-school and out-of-school literacies. It points to the potentials of a media literacy approach in helping to expand both student and teacher literacy perceptions. If media literacy can be integrated with a greater focus on new literacies, both contexts can be approached with a stronger critical lens.

In seeking to expand perceptions of literacy practices, Lewis and Fabos (2005) performed a qualitative case study asking, What function does IM (Instant Messaging) serve in the lives of youth? For what purposes do they use this form of digital literacy? For what

reasons and under what circumstances do they find it most compelling? The researchers performed audiotaped semistructured interviews with seven primary participants, four girls and three boys, all European Americans and between the ages of 14 and 17, in participant homes. Some of these interviews were performed in pairs, while others were individual interviews. Videotaped interviews were performed with a few of the participants in which they performed a protocol analysis, or “think-aloud”, while engaging in instant messaging conversations. While five of the participants came from middle class families, two participants were from working class families.

Lewis and Fabos (2005) found that the participants favored instant messaging over other forms of Internet communication. The young participants demonstrated a sense of purpose and informed participation while using instant messaging to communicate strategically and creatively with peers. The participants negotiated the social space of the Internet while practicing a diverse range of writing practices. The researchers found that the youth in the study employed complex literacy strategies while using instant messaging, yet they offer interesting perspective on the place of such literacies within the school context. Schools need not focus on such forms of literacy, but instead focus more on forms of literacy that students are less capable of mastering on their own but need to learn in order to be successful in school, or as involved citizens. Yet, educators should maintain an awareness of where these practices connect and relate to the classroom literacy practices.

The researchers collected data in many different ways, using the ‘think-aloud’ concept to observe the instant messaging practice in action, and to understand the multitudinous nature of conversations with close to ten different ‘buddies’ at a time. The researchers sought out participants whom they had a solid report with. They believed this would help the transparency of each participant’s actions and thoughts while discussing instant messaging. The researchers also attempted to represent a working class

background. They do acknowledge the difficulties in obtaining a truly organic demonstration of instant messaging through the think-aloud video interviews.

The participant group is small, and represents only a narrow European American perspective on instant messaging use. The size of the group prevents generalizability. The selection of the group appeared to be dictated more by the researchers and their social network. Though they wanted to have some relationship, it may have posed some issues in terms of bias for the participants.

The literacy skills employed while instant messaging offer another critical angle on the understanding of literacy. Lewis and Fabos (2005) do proceed with caution when presenting their findings, and they suggest that instant messaging did not necessarily deserve a place inside of school. Yet, there should be a more deliberate use of such literacy practices, so that the skills could be used to access other more traditional academic literacy practices.

Like the work of Lewis and Fabos (2005), Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) elaborated on the findings of the Kaiser Foundation with their study, *"Tech-Savviness" Meets Multiliteracies: Exploring Adolescent Girls' Technology-Mediated Literacy Practices*. Through their two case studies that blended traditional qualitative and teacher-researcher approaches, the researchers sought to understand the ways and purposes adolescent girls use digital technologies in their literacy practices beyond formal academic settings. How their membership in various online communities of practice influence these technology-mediated literacy practices, and how constructions of gender were implicated in the girls' technology-mediated literacy practices within these communities.

The initial set of participants in the study consisted of 12 seventh- and eighth-grade girls who used one or more digital technologies proficiently or frequently in their literacy practices beyond school. Participants were identified/selected based on their responses to

an informal survey about their technology use, analysis of school-related products that incorporated technology, and conversations about technology use in classes, study halls, and extracurricular activities. All participants were of European American descent, yet they varied in terms of socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and position in the peer culture. The two focal informants of the study, Rhiannon and Eileen, were chosen for their frequent Internet usage, their interest in talking about those literacy practices, their different uses of digital technologies to enact their Japanese animation 'fandom.' The two girls provided a study of different approaches to the digital technologies. One participant sought to understand how the digital technologies worked, while the other participant in the study sought to know what these technologies were capable of doing.

The two authors were able to study the participants in different contexts. Mahar, a seventh-grade English teacher, gathered data through interactions with the students in her classes, study hall, and before- or after-school activities, while Chandler-Olcott spent one or two days a week in Donna's classes and study halls, observing and interviewing and informants about their technology use. Chandler-Olcott also conducted home visits with informants and their families. The data on Rhiannon and Eileen's technology-mediated literacy practices was collected over 18 months through field notes from formal and informal interviews, field notes from interviews with the girls' teachers, field notes taken from their participation in an informal, technology-focused discussion group that met in study hall during the fall of 2000, field notes from home visits made to both families in May and June, 2001, artifacts provided by the girls, email messages, and printed copies of websites the girls either visited or constructed. The theoretical conceptualization and data analysis of the study were collaborative efforts performed by both researchers.

Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) found that adolescent girls employ technological tools in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. They observed the girls' technology-

mediated practices inside and outside school and found practices that were not privileged in classes, yet were highly-valued beyond school. Their practices demonstrated the key tenets of expressivist literacy pedagogy that position purpose, audience, and time as essential elements to joining the literacy club community. At the same time, the researchers observed the critical role of overt instruction and critical framing in the two girls' path toward full membership in a more contemporary literacy practice. Both girls appeared to use their membership in online communities to create richer and more satisfying social lives. Chandler-Olcott and Mahar were able to observe the in-group variation that exists in how early adolescent girls view and use technology within particular communities of practice. Issues of social class also arose in the potentials and restrictions placed on each girls access to the Internet, the major tool which allowed them to develop their individual literacy practice.

The researchers were able to perform a prolonged study, which allowed for longer and more extensive involvement with the two main informants. Because the researchers participated in a collaborative and reciprocal process of developing the theoretical base and analyzing the collected data, the findings can be seen as more credible. Each researcher was able to gain a peer review of assumptions, data, findings, and implications. The researchers were also able to confirm their observations and findings with the two informants through extensive member checking. The various sources of data help provide triangulation, and offer even greater credibility to the findings. The theoretical foundation of the study, along with the connection to previous research on the subject, corroborates many of the findings.

The transferability of this study is restricted in several different ways. First, the girls only represent a single racial/ethnic group (European American). Second, the unique qualities of Rhiannon's literacy practices suggest that her existence as an exception offers

little potential for understanding other females and their technology-mediated literacy practices.

This study presents the unique qualities of many technology-mediated literacy practices. It highlights the need for certain practices to be encouraged and cultivated in a public classroom alongside more traditional perceptions of literacy practice. Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) see such efforts contributing to a more student-centered classroom, and a pedagogy that acknowledges the evolving and changing shape of literacy in the world.

Educators should remain careful about assuming expertise and understanding of new literacies among all students. They should remain aware of the social class distinctions that technology use and access can highlight. These differences should be bridged together, while providing a platform where skills can be shared and understanding disseminated across different students and groups. Privilege should not be accorded to internet- and tech-savvy students in the classroom, yet their skills should be valued and acknowledged.

Sanford and Madill (2007) attempted to chronicle the out-of-school literacies of adolescent males in their study, *Understanding the Power of New Literacies through Video Game Play and Design*. Their qualitative case study sought to understand the success adolescent males find in out-of-school literacy practices. Along with chronicling the literacy practices that occur when adolescent males participate in instructing the creation of video games. Finally they looked for answers regarding the question: Where is a space for adolescent males to think critically about video games?

The researchers observed one nine-week and two five-week sessions of a video game camp. Adolescent instructors were observed as they worked alongside younger students. The instructors were hired by an entrepreneur in a mid-sized Canadian city to run the camps in his video game facility. The instructors were predominantly males ranging in



ages from 11-16 years old. They were from a range of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The students were mostly males aged between 8-12 from diverse backgrounds.

The study uses researcher observation (field notes) and focus group interviews, supplemented by digital images of the games being created, as well as, audio recordings of the conversations between the game instructors and their students. The data was documented, analyzed, and coded for significant themes, using Green's three-dimensional model of literacy: operational literacy, cultural literacy and critical literacy.

It was found that video games and video game creation offered valuable literacy learning, specifically in the operational and cultural literacy dimensions. Observations revealed rich literacy practices. Yet, the researchers could not find the serious critical engagement with video games they felt was needed to address issues of social justice. The findings indicate that further understanding is needed for parents and educators to be able to guide students toward a critical understanding of the literacies involved in video game play and creation.

Sanford and Madill (2007) provide quotes that serve to corroborate their point. The study has a strong theoretical background. The researchers' take on critical literacy is also noteworthy, and connects to previous studies. For these reasons, and based upon further research into the subject matter, the study does possess dependability.

Despite these strengths, the researchers are vague in their descriptions of the sample groups. Though they make claims about the state of boys and their literacy habits, the researchers don't ever establish if the participants in the study struggle, or have struggled in school, and to what extent these video game practices be used to encourage or discourage literacy within school. The study provides no evidence of member checking. The researchers never address the bias involved in their observation practices, nor do they

describe in detail the questions posed to the instructors during the interviews. There is very little discussion on the credibility of their claims. These issues pose threats to the study's credibility, along with its transferability.

Sanford and Madill (2007) raise some important issues in their research of video game production in an out-of-school context. The issues of media consumption versus media production highlight the need to empower students with the ability to create their own cultural products. At the same time, students can investigate the social, political, and cultural implications of these media artifacts. The study presents a dilemma regarding the space that lies between using a medium, and critically understanding it. Yet, it does not offer much in the way of new thinking on the issue. Out-of-school literacies are not always of the digital variety. Often students can participate in the production of texts as a form of resistance to the usual avenues for media production.

Alongside the research dealing exclusively with digital out-of-school literacies, Chu (1997) presented an account of an older literacy practice that joins the personal nature of most new literacies with a more critical media engagement. *Navigating the Media Environment: How Youth Claim a Place through Zines* is a qualitative case study exploring youth and their media interests. As Chu indicates, "The task is to seriously explore how young people take an active role in shaping their media environment and, particularly, how they view media in their everyday lives" (p. 72). Ultimately, What do zines mean to the youths who produce and consume them?

Chu (1997) sought out more than two-dozen zine publishers, chronicling the exchanges through writings, phone, email, or snail mail. Chu also visited local bookstores, record shops, and the Usenet group *alt.zines*, as well as zine readings, workshops, and conferences where publishers and readers gathered to trade zines, share tips, and form friendships and alliances.

The findings revealed that most zine publishers see media as one of the only hopeful environments in an era of increasing public retrenchment of material and moral support for young people. Zines articulate young people's strong need for a place of their own, despite the vanishing of such public spaces from the material environment. The media environment provided one of the few places where youth might be able to carve out a place for themselves. Zines provided publishers the chance to form their own definitions and meanings, while creating their own definition of 'youth.' Zines also serve as a discrete and peripheral realm where youth might be able to resist the homogenizing effects of the mainstream media. Chu (1997) found that zine publishers were astute critics of their media environment, and were often attuned to the link between communication and power. Zines invite everyone to become a producer, and to shed the passive image of a consumer as the object of mass media attention. Zine production can be a critical engagement with the tools of representation and meaning.

Chu (1997) offers an engaging and detailed history of zines and their growing popularity over the past two decades. Chu also provides direct quotes and sources that help to reinforce her claims regarding the significance of zine production. Because she only sets out to chronicle the perceptions of zine publishers, the article provides a strong set of views and perceptions that deepen and complexify the role of youth in the interactions of consumer and media. Given these different sources and quotations, the findings appear credible.

Chu (1997) does not offer many specifics on the different interview subjects. It does not seem possible to determine the diversity and range of the group of publishers and their opinions. The researcher also fails to include any evidence of member checking. Chu does not provide any specific questions or interview protocols that she might have used to gather her data. Given these gaps in the methods, the transferability of the findings is limited. One

wonders about the set of youth who do not participate in zine production, and how their perceptions of media, and its role in their lives, might differ.

Zines offer a space for youth who feel disenfranchised and isolated by the productions of mass media. Zines allow youth to take control of their creative energies, and enter into the discourse of publishing through grassroots and public outlets. The production of zines offers publishers a sense of agency and voice that can help engage them in their various communities. This study of zines creates a stronger rationale for helping students move beyond the formal structures of school that seem to repel their energies and passions. Though, it does seem that the article falls short of offering insights into the orientation of newcomers into the zine publishing culture.

The research presented here, involving the study of out-of-school literacy practices, highlights the new and original ways students read, write, and communicate in their daily lives. These practices are expanded and facilitated by the continued growth and consolidation of the Internet and subsequent digital technologies. The findings indicate the need for educators to understand and make use of the skills and practices being enacted outside of school. It is this approach which might help engage traditionally marginalized students, as well as provide them a chance to see the transferability of their out-of-school practices to more traditional literacy practices.

#### Identity and the Media

In looking at the ways adolescents interact with the media in their lives, and the different literacies these interactions reveal, it is possible to recognize the ways identity construction continues to occur in these different contexts. Because both educators and students involve themselves in the media, both participate in processes of identity construction in relation to the media they actively consume. Fisherkeller (2000) and Tisdell and Thompson (2007) help connect and shed light on these different processes as they

study adolescents and U.S. adult educators. These studies highlight the fact that everyone finds some enjoyment in active media consumption, and often individuals construct parts of their identities through their daily media interactions. Educators would do well to understand their own conceptions of media, along with remembering that attempts to promote a critical understanding of media and digital technologies will be fruitless without first working to understand the mediated identities of their students.

FisherKeller (2000) highlighted three case studies stemming from her ethnographic research in New York City. The larger research involved eighteen months at an alternative middle school in the New York City public school system. Participants in the study included sixty racially and ethnically diverse students, their teachers, and their families, who were primarily in the working classes, some receiving public assistance, some with middle incomes. The researcher visited the school three to four times a week over the course of the research. The article focused on three individuals. They were interviewed on two separate occasions, one year apart. The three students were chosen for their diversity of experiences to aid in comparing processes of identity construction and learning about social power in-depth across cases. Dezeray is a thirteen-year-old Latina female from a lower-income household, Wolverine is a twelve-year-old African American male from a working-class household, and Samantha is a thirteen-year-old Euro-American female from a middle-class household. The researcher gathered and interpreted their talk and writing and analyzed the programs they watched. This information was gathered from a survey.

Through the findings, FisherKeller (2000) hoped to explore what young adolescents learn about their possible identities, success and social power relations in United States culture, along with understanding the role commercial TV played in their everyday learning about these topics. Finally, the research sought to uncover how media educators can help young adolescents understand themselves, power, and media, such as TV, in a critical

manner? Fisherkeller found that the subjects used meanings found in favorite TV personas to help them negotiate, at least imaginatively, a dilemma associated with their particular presentation of self in social worlds. The subjects observed and experienced power relations as these relations played out in daily social constructions of gender, race, class and other identities, whether in their actual lives or on TV. They also observed power relations in the industry systems of image and message construction. The learning that took place generally occurred because of parallels in actual life and TV. The subjects were aware and could express an understanding of the constructed and commercial nature of television.

As evidenced by the larger ethnographic research project, the researcher engaged in prolonged immersion with the community, and school. The researcher provided a comprehensive background of each participant, and offered direct quotes to support the research claims. The study also offered media educators' questions and issues to ponder, while explaining the limits of the study in terms of transferability. The experiences of these young adolescents mirrored those of adult educators and graduate level university students found in the study of popular culture and individual perception/experience written by Tisdell and Thompson (2007).

As Fisherkeller (2000) indicates, the experiences and realities constructed by the subjects were very personal and individualized. Each individual experienced media messages differently, thus the transferability remains limited because of the personal stories drawn around each subject's experiences. The researcher does not provide any evidence of investigating her personal biases as they might have related to her personal relationships with the participants and their families. Fisherkeller fails to offer up any instances of member checking which might have provided greater credibility to her personal interpretations of the participant's thoughts and words.

This study points to the tensions and complexities that exist in negotiating real life experiences and constructed television worlds/identities. It is also possible to infer the continued risk in attempting to propose critical investigations of media texts that are pleasurable to students. In attempting to redefine and renegotiate the visions of success and identity provided by entertainment and commercial media, educators must recognize the position of marginalization they might be offering students who still look to the American celebrity dream as a route of possible 'success.' Yet, the students within this study are aware of the media power dynamics, which might allow for further critical development and understanding. While the rise of social networking sites has transformed the ability of adolescence to construct their identity, there still appears some relevance in understanding the influence of television. The construction of these identities may still be grounded in popular media.

Tisdell and Thompson (2007) seek to understand the second half of the student-teacher interaction. They explore US adult educators consumption of entertainment media, how it affects their thinking about group identities, and how they draw upon it in their teaching and learning, particularly in regard to teaching about diversity issues. To achieve this, the researchers used a mixed methods study employing a quantitative survey, and a qualitative set of interviews involving 15 adult educators. Also, class syllabi provided other data.

The mixed method data collection involved a survey of adult education faculty and students across the U.S. Following pilot testing and three revisions, the final survey was composed of 32 questions focusing on: Viewing frequency and type of entertainment media viewed, general preference in TV and cinema, main character preferences (based on gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation), the amount and type of informal discussion of entertainment media among family, friends, and colleagues, the use of media in teaching,

and demographic information. A purposeful group of 15 adult educators was selected to participate in taped interviews in which questions focused on the types of entertainment media they viewed and why. The researchers also sought to discover the meaning adult educators made from the portrayal of characters, and their learning that involved people of different gender, race, and sexual orientation groups.

Masters and doctoral level adult education course participants, along with adult educators, completed 215 surveys. Among the 15 members of the survey group who participated in the interviews, 11 were women, and 4 men; 5 people of color, 10 white; 5 of the interviewed participants were gay, lesbian or bisexual.

The article focused mainly on the qualitative results gathered from the interviews. The findings focused on how the participants use of media facilitated: finding alternative narratives for themselves, expanded thinking about 'others,' and furthered interaction and analysis of social relations. Nearly all participants indicated that they chose to watch media that related to their own personal story in some way, helping them to see alternative narratives in their own lives or for others in their communities. They specifically talked about relating to characters or situations, and perceiving new choices as a result of engagement with the text. Participants also spoke to the potential of media to expand their thinking about 'others'. Among the participants, media also stimulated interactions and furthered their social and media analysis. The researchers emphasized a particular moment from the study when a participant highlighted the role that media and critical discussion could play in leading to greater understanding about a subject.

Tisdell and Thompson (2007) provide a great deal of concrete qualitative data pulled from their different participant interviews. They are up front about the demographics of their participant group, and indicate that the qualitative participants were either faculty or graduate students, many of whom had either taught or taken classes



related to diversity, and were more conscious of such issues than most people. The researchers conducted and analyzed their qualitative interview data according to the constant comparative method. They performed member checks with many of the participants. These efforts help provide a level of credibility to the study and its qualitative findings.

The participant group is a very select and limited group of individuals who have spent a great deal of time in higher education. This limits the transferability of the findings beyond this specific group of media consumers. The interview participants were chosen because their survey responses indicated that they were quite media savvy, particularly about diversity issues. This may be a case of the researchers, in seeking to find knowledgeable subjects who could provide the kind of evidence needed for the study, failing to fully acknowledge to the reader the potential for confirmation bias to play a role in the data collection.

Critical understanding of media and literacy practices is necessary for participation in the mediated environments we all live in. The study helps point to the value of using media in conjunction with a serious or informal discussion. In using this dialogic approach to critical media literacy, conversations with peers can help enrich the experience and understanding of media and its effects. Deliberative learning, espoused by the research behind political socialization, confirms that critical media literacy requires an exchange between different individuals. This study also points to the need to develop these skills in many different contexts. It also provides a clear rationale for critical media literacy, and indicates the use of such skills for the rest of an individual's life.

Understanding identity construction can help shed further light on different pedagogical techniques that might cultivate a stronger critical stance toward media text in all mediums. The research findings in this section indicate a need for both students and

educators to become more critically aware of the way media can construct and deconstruct an individual's identity. Identity construction is also a way to imagine new approaches to media and a student's daily interactions with it. These findings also point to the same type of individual empowerment made possible by out-of-school literacy practices discussed in the previous section.

### Popular Culture, Students, and the Classroom

Popular culture and media present a range of texts that students are familiar with and engage with outside of class. The debate, however, continues over the advantages of bringing such texts into the classroom, whether for content purposes, or for engagement with the media itself. The issue is not black and white, and ultimately, the research points to many pitfalls and dilemmas facing educators, parents, and policy makers as they approach decisions on popular culture in the classroom. Educators must be aware of the influence that popular culture texts may have on their students' perceptions of content, as well as, the ways students' identities and interests can be marginalized through the refusal to incorporate such texts.

A study performed by Savage (2008) deals directly with the issues connecting students with popular culture texts inside and outside the classroom. Savage wanted to find out the ways students' voices, and individual potential for engagement, were at risk when teachers refused to critically engage relevant pop culture and media texts in a classroom. The part quantitative survey of student experiences with texts in classrooms and part qualitative ethnography of those experiences, used a methodological perspective informed by post structuralism, critical theory, autoethnography, and Foucauldian theories of subjectivity.

A survey was delivered to 15- to 16- year old students from a multi-ethnic state high school in Perth, Australia allowing for direct comparison between the types of texts

regularly consumed by students and the extent to which they studied these same texts in English. Observations and semi-structured interviews were then performed with the participants.

Savage (2008) found that being “brand-savvy, white, straight, and attractive held major (social) currency” (p. 55), in school. While students may possess a critical view of media constructed values and norms, “one’s critical faculty does not necessarily allow one to realize freedom from subjugation in a society defined by the corporate-drenched discourses of popular culture” (p. 56). At the same time, there was evidence of teachers silencing the everyday popular culture experiences of young people by deploying archaic and apathetic pedagogical practices. Teachers remained out of touch despite some efforts to engage popular culture texts. Through the research, Savage promoted a possible ‘pedagogy of intervention.’

The researcher provides a strong theoretical background, along with a convincing personal narrative and rationale for the study. The study demonstrates a complex notion of media perceptions and social norms, while it makes the case for incorporating pop culture texts in the classroom by employing both the quantitative and qualitative data. Anecdotes and direct quotes from students help elaborate the researcher’s points. The various data sources promote credibility through triangulation.

In seeking the engagement of all students, pop culture texts may be employed in a language arts classroom as a source of prior knowledge, and as the starting point to a critical investigation of such texts. The study presents a case of the marginalization of student voice and identity when such texts are kept out of the classroom. These texts offer rich opportunities for an investigation of social norms, influence and meaning. While the author presents a strong case for inclusion, the study lacks practical and clear application of the findings.

Savage (2008) presented opportunities for critical engagement with the way media shapes our daily interactions, yet using pop culture texts as supplements for general classroom content presents a range of questions and possible concerns. As Barnett et al. (2006) demonstrated in their study of the potential impact of a popular science fiction film, *The Core*, on student understanding of earth science concepts, often concepts may be exaggerated and students may come away with misunderstandings about key content.

The researchers set up a quantitative quasi experiment using naturalistic observation and a nonequivalent control group design. 82 students across five 8<sup>th</sup> grade science classrooms experienced the same 4-week curriculum unit on Earth Science that included lessons on the Earth's interior structure, Earth's magnetic field, earthquakes, and plate tectonics. At the end of the unit the teacher showed three of her classes, *The Core* while the other two classes finished their portfolios of the Earth science unit. The researcher's interview data was scored through a rubric ranging from a score of 0 to 4. Students were interviewed prior to the beginning of the unit, and once more following the completion of the unit. On top of the interview data, pre and post, multiple choice, content tests were studied.

Barnett et al. (2006) found that a single viewing of a popular science fiction film can have a great influence on student ideas and conceptual understanding of scientific concepts. Students who watched *The Core* had a larger tendency to think that the inner core of the Earth was liquid rather than a solid. Other themes involved misunderstandings built upon plausibility, scientific authority of the main character, and movie images remaining more memorable in student minds than hands-on in-class experiences.

The study establishes a strong case for the effects of the film based on a variety of data sources. The researchers also triangulated their interview data with student papers,

journals, and homework assignments. By employing a control group, the researchers attempted to account for history and maturation in their participant group.

The researchers are up-front about the shortcomings of their study. Because of the small-scale of the study, the findings are not necessarily representative of the population at large. Further, in order to make more generalized claims regarding the impact of popular science fiction films on student ideas the researchers might need to interview students who have seen several science fiction films and compare those interviews to students who have not viewed science fiction films. The researchers fail to address other factors that might have influenced student response to the film. The researchers do not address the threat to internal validity posed by the potential for students to become “test-wise” following the pre and posttests. There is also little evidence provided regarding any attempt to control for differential selection in the groups.

The ability of media, film, television, and the Internet to shape popular conceptions and to direct student thought should not be underestimated. The problem of 'information pollution,' the presentation of fiction as fact, is directly related to the effort to cultivate a critical engagement with student media. By refusing to engage the movie beyond the assistance to curricular goals and content, educators fail to facilitate the critical deconstruction of texts. Given the amount of student daily interaction with media, further research should go into the propagation of misunderstandings through various media.

Using media in the classroom, particularly movies, has been a practice of educators since the advent of motion pictures (Spring, 2005). Yet, as Renee Hobbs (2006) highlights in her study *Non-Optimal Uses of Video in the Classroom*, often these practices work directly against student learning and can serve to harden the position of those opposed to bringing media text into the classroom. Hobbs explored the use of television, films, videos and other audio-visual or mass media materials in the classroom, with a particular focus on

identifying instructional practices that are non-optimal (i.e. those teacher behaviors that may diminish or limit the potential value of films and videos as tools to support active student learning).

Hobbs (2006) employed a combination of qualitative case studies and quantitative telephone survey responses. For the qualitative aspects of the study, Hobbs observed and interviewed 15 teachers enrolled in a graduate program on media studies, education and technology. Hobbs also interviewed administrators, staff and teachers (along with observing 12 more teachers) from a large urban Massachusetts school district. The researcher then generated a typology of the most common practices that I observed in elementary and secondary classrooms, practices that appeared to diminish or reduce the potential value of video as a learning tool.

For the quantitative telephone survey, purposive samples of 130 teachers in grades 7-12 were interviewed. The survey was designed to determine the most frequent self-reported types of use of video and other mass media in the classroom, and to determine the level of teacher awareness of the use of video for non-educational reasons. Teachers were asked to report how frequently they used different media on a four-point scale. They were then asked if they had ever witnessed non-educational uses of media in schools by their colleagues, and then asked to report the frequency of this on a four-point scale. College students from a university in the Northeast were invited to conduct telephone interviews with two of their former middle school or high-school teachers as part of their assignment on media research methods. Twenty of the interviews were collected and coded by Hobbs. Students, provided with a written interview protocol, and trained in a procedure for conducting the interview data in written form, selected two teachers to interview. The telephone interviews were designed to confirm the qualitative evidence collected by Hobbs (2006).

15 teachers from a working-class community approximately 30 miles northwest of Boston, serving 6400 Caucasian students in nine schools, provided the first set of qualitative data. The second set of observations and interviews took place in a K-6 elementary school in a large urban Massachusetts school district. The school enrolled more than 600 students, with approximately 50% minority group membership. 12 teachers were observed. For the quantitative telephone survey/interview 130 teachers in grades 7-12 were sampled.

Hobbs (2006) found that teachers used video, film, and other media in non-optimal ways, often suiting the needs of teachers instead of students. The seven instructional practices that Hobbs identified as non-optimal included: No clearly identified instructional purposes; No use of pause, rewind, or review; Large-group viewing experiences giving teachers a 'break;' teacher mentally disengaging during viewing experiences; Teacher using TV viewing as a reward; Teacher using media only as an attentional hook; and Teacher using video to control student behavior. The combination of the qualitative and quantitative data suggested that most teachers do not harness the immense potential of using media and technology tools for communication, research, self-expression and problem solving. Instead, the teachers from the study primarily used media as a vehicle for delivering informational content to students. The findings and interview responses also raise the issue of student engagement and motivation, and whether these become an end rather than a means to learning.

Hobbs (2006) performs triangulation by collecting data from a diverse set of qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher collected data from rural/suburban areas, as well as urban areas. She also highlights her efforts to overcome the social desirability bias during the telephone interviews and observations. Hobbs sought to create a space where teachers could express their experiences comfortably, and by doing so, generating a more authentic set of responses. Hobbs does acknowledge the limitations of the research

methodology, and indicates the need to understand the factors that may cause content delivery approaches to be so common, and to explore why many of the other uses involving mass media resources are infrequently used.

The researcher did not provide any evidence concerning member checking during the telephone interviews. The use of college students as research assistants during the telephone survey phase indicated possible incongruencies in collection methods, and the authenticity of responses. It is possible that some of the responses could have been fabricated to simply fulfill the class requirement. Hobbs (2006) also indicated the possibility that teacher responses were affected by the telephone collection method. This method of communication could have prevented a clear exchange between the interviewer and interviewee.

As highlighted in this study, the non-optimal use of certain media and communication technologies can create situations that complicate the potential of future media literacy projects. If media continues to be perceived as harmless and innocuous entertainment then it will remain a form of escape or relaxation, a break from the daily grind. If this mindset remains the same, then most parents, administrators and students will fail to recognize the power and potential of media studies to foster critical literacy and thinking. Teachers should be clear in their goals and expectations for bringing media texts into the classroom. They should remain wary of using media as an edge in the attention economy that can often control the classroom. Often, engagement can become an end in and of itself, but with a critically conscious approach, it can exist as a means toward greater knowledge and learning. This study suggests ways media should be employed and used within the classroom so as to avoid these so called non-optimal uses. Many of the strategies and suggestions found in the research presented in this paper may offer more optimal uses of media in the classroom.



Given the findings, one may be left with many more questions: Are teachers over worked and under appreciated, and thus alienated from their work? Are they choosing to employ their Movie-nanny instead of their own energy? Are teachers struggling under the increasingly heavy demands on their time, struggling to find ways to fit all of their duties into a day? Yet, much of the issue may involve a teacher's education, and the preparation given to them during their certification process in the efforts of media literacy.

Lewis and Ketter (2008) provided a perspective on this need to equip teachers with the skills to actively investigate media and new literacies critically alongside their students. In their ethnographic case study, *Encoding Youth: Popular Culture and Multicultural Literature in a Rural Context*, The researchers participated in monthly book discussions alongside 8 middle school teachers, all white females. During the book discussions references to youths and popular culture became the topic of conversation in order to examine data connected to the theme of critical multiliteracies. Data was collected through audiotaped sessions, audiotaped interviews with participants and eleven community informants, written responses to surveys, an audiotaped focus group discussion of group dynamics, and both observational and reflective field notes. The researchers maintained a careful analysis of their own positions within the study group and community involving status, affiliation, and ideological stance.

All of the participants volunteered without expectation of time off or monetary compensation, but during the first two years of the study funds were available to purchase the discussion books and to provide one classroom set of books for each teacher. The book group continued on, and gained new participants, long after the study was officially concluded. The researchers explicitly highlight their unique position as both insiders (being members of the community involved in the study) and outsiders (as members of the college community with a set of specific theoretical outlook).

The purpose of the study involved understanding the ways in which teachers' constructions of youth identity and popular culture might foster or inhibit using texts in ways that engage struggling readers in school literacies. The researchers sought to demonstrate how participating teachers perceived youth identity and culture in young adult literature, and how they began to shift these perceptions and ways of reading. Through the book group intervention, it was found that teachers and adults often read young adult fiction with the purpose of making connections, or through seeking universals of defining oneself against the otherness of marginalized adolescents. This reading loses sight of how identity is always performed in place: place being a location that is gendered, raced, and classed. As Lewis and Ketter conclude, educators must continue to develop the ability to recognize naturalized codes in their own readings of text, yet they acknowledge the difficulty of enacting pedagogies that challenge and examine these codes.

The study provided direct quotes, and various qualitative data to back up the claim regarding teachers and their tendency to universalize, and 'other,' adolescent experience. It also raised issues of teachers and their efforts to include multicultural texts in a classroom. The researchers acknowledged their various lenses and roles within the reading group, and identified the ways these different perspectives influenced the discussion group dynamics.

Lewis and Ketter (2008) never appropriately address the effects these reading groups had on actual classroom practice. There is no evidence of the teachers actually taking away and using the ideas in their classrooms. While the researchers discussed the personal growth of each teacher, how these practices might be used in a classroom was never fully discussed. The teachers did express their struggles in trying to engage with multicultural literature. While this study remains a starting point for investigating further approaches to teacher training, it does help clarify many of the challenges that will have to be overcome in future research efforts.

Another challenge facing educators and their students involves the influx of new technologies entering schools. A great deal has been made about these new tools for learning and their potential to create '21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms.' Yet, they carry with them their own set of complex problems to be worked out by those who use them. Knight, Dixon, Norton and Bentley (2004) sought to understand the ways Black and Latino/a youth's identities as active learners and college bound musicians shape, and are shaped, in the interplay of new technologies, multiple literacies, and traditional pedagogies, within the distance education music classroom. The researchers focused on Black and Latino/a youth from under resourced urban communities so as to examine new technologies, multiple literacies, and traditional banking model and culture blind pedagogies of a learning community extended through videoconferencing.

Their ethnographic case study from a two-year qualitative study, used constant comparison analysis and looked at a cross-aged group of 24 Black and Latino/a youth in grades 9-12 participating in a distance education program coordinated by one of the school's music teachers with a music conservatory as part of a community outreach program. A professor and three graduate students from the conservatory lead the sessions via video conferencing. Students were specifically picked based on interest, and as a reward for good behavior. Data sources for the study included observations of the three distance education music sessions and participation in and observation of the evaluation session. Two separate audiotaped formal interviews were conducted with the supervising music teacher and the school's arts program administrator.

The study points to the pervasiveness and importance of technology in the lives of youth from under resourced urban communities. The researchers identify issues in technology use regarding the ways youth shape and are shaped by the literacies, curricula, and pedagogical practices that permeate the classrooms they inhabit and the norms that are

created and fostered. One of the most important findings points to a need to understand that forms of technology are not value-neutral objects, and that “technologies alone will not deliver the promises of equity and access for all youth” (p. 116).

The study provides a detailed theoretical background, which creates a powerful lens through which to view the reported data. The researchers performed triangulation across multiple sources of data. Yet, they failed to inform their data with interviews from the student participants. They project onto students the majority of the evidence, depicting their feelings and the actions of the students. The students do not really have a voice in most of the data. There was no evidence of member checking. The participant group selection process does not necessarily guarantee an even representation of students from the school. The study does deal specifically with college-bound groups, so this particular research might have required a focus for the perception of individuals as 'good students.' Based on these weaknesses there appears to be issues with the study's transferability and credibility.

Technologies must be addressed with a critical eye to the context and ideologies that permeate and inform their use in a classroom. There is a need to position the multimodal texts and forms of media literacy within a cultural, political and ideological context. One can see evidence of the social consequences of technology such as the reproduction of inequities. Allowing the classroom to become a space where students investigate these issues through the deconstruction of media texts fosters a critical engagement with issues of power and political engagement. The development of these critical thinking faculties can then be focused and generalized beyond media, and used in other contexts outside the classroom.

#### Popular Culture and Multiliteracies Interventions

Employing curriculum in the classroom that makes use of popular culture and multiliteracies does not always have to rely on the appropriate use of technologies. Tapping

into the understandings and expectations that students bring into the classroom regarding multimodal design and popular culture texts may involve simply creating a scenario within which students can employ their expertise to gain a new understanding of classroom content. The new literacy concepts emerging in professional literature can be acted out in many different ways. The following set of research seeks to demonstrate these practices as they play out in different interventions. It is important to keep in mind the different ways these researchers and educators attempted to rethink their perceptions of literacy, along with their definitions of reading and writing.

Feree (2001), in *Soaps and Suspicious Activity: Dramatic Experiences in British Classrooms*, observed two instructional units with differing but strong dramatic components, both based on forms of popular media. The focus for the study involved literacy instruction in two British classrooms, with a particular emphasis on how middle schoolers engage with literature. In Ms. Davis' class, Feree studied a four-week soap-opera unit in which students wrote and rehearsed different soap opera influenced vignettes or episodes. Mr. Fawcett's class studied and worked on the reporting of fictional news accounts, and sought to understand the role of a news reporter.

The subsequent qualitative case studies sought to understand what made these particular interventions so successful. What aspects of this instruction constitute what is held to be effective in literacy instruction for this age level? The researcher observed and studied at two different sites. The first site was an urban comprehensive school located in a small city in southwest England. The classroom featured 19 girls and 12 boys with varying socioeconomic levels, and a predominantly Anglo ethnic background. The second classroom site served a small coastal village with little conspicuous wealth, and featured 16 girls and 12 boys. The focus of the study was on participating teacher's instruction to one class in which the students were in year 9 (ages 13-14). All groups participating in the interventions

were observed on a daily basis. Conclusions were reached through observations over a six-month period during one academic year.

Feree (2001) found that the combination of student choice, the teacher's role as facilitator, realistic material/content, active learning, collaboration, the use of media and technology, and the use of authentic assessment all contributed to a innovative classroom experience that helped create a valuable and engaging learning opportunity for students. Based on Feree's observations, the teacher's were able to create learning-centered practices that engaged students in various literacy skills.

Feree (2001) presents a solid theoretical background that helps defend her observations and conclusions. The researcher offers clear evidence to support the study's claims, and indicates a prolonged engagement with each classroom. Her description of the process and procedures followed by the classes offers potential for transferability. Though, the same success is not necessarily guaranteed. The lessons and theories studied in this research have been mirrored in many other studies dealing with multimedia and multimodal lessons in the classroom. Despite some obvious shortcomings in research methods, the credibility of the study is helped through previous research.

There is mention of only one form of data collection in the study. Feree (2001) offered a limited number of direct quotations, but does not include any evidence of possible interviews or member checks. The majority of her conclusions appeared to be drawn from her own observations, yet she does not include any reference to the possible biases she carried with her into the classroom. Because she does not seek to address issues of credibility, it appears that the study lacks a great deal of transferability.

The use of assignments that engage students in active use of various media modes can help to foster a wider sense of literacy. Students will be able to engage in ways that push them to think differently about the texts they encounter throughout their lives outside of

school. Feree (2001) makes the components of a successful lesson very clear, and provides these two examples as a way to imagine their actual production. Yet, while it seems that many literacy skills are being refined and cultivated, there is a potential for Feree's observations to cloud any evidence that might suggest the students were having fun and enjoying themselves, but not necessarily learning.

While Feree's (2001) research focused on the language arts classroom, Stevens (2001) was able to chronicle three different case studies looking at the use of popular culture in different content-areas. Four specific questions were posed: How does an educator go about bringing popular culture into the classroom? What planning must occur that is unique to popular culture lessons? How do lessons incorporating popular culture fit into existing curricula? How will students respond to bringing their more personal discourse communities into their classrooms?

Stevens (2001) put up flier in an urban middle school, with a largely middle-class population and faculty, offering an opportunity for teachers to learn about bringing popular culture into the classroom. Three teachers answered the call. The participants included teachers in an eighth grade physical science class, a seventh grade language arts class, and a seventh grade social studies class. Together, the teachers and the researcher created lesson plans that were then put into practice. The researcher observed and participated in the actual classroom activities. She offered direct quotes from students, teacher interpretation, as well as, her own observations.

The researcher found that in planning such a set of popular culture or critical media literacy lessons, teachers needed to have a genuine respect for students' interests and membership in various discourse communities. Teachers also had specific curricular goals in mind when framing the lessons. Educators need support in finding ways to match popular culture studies with their overriding curricula, or perhaps to explore why popular

culture may still be valid, though it may not fit with specific curricula. Educators could also address the potential for popular culture texts to go beyond suitable public discourse. Student choice is another major aspect of popular culture lessons. Students respond positively to these lessons, and they demonstrate an understanding that flies in the face of the protectionist view of students as passive media consumers. The researcher found that such critical media literacy lessons could help improve student ability to link concepts across multiple texts, while engaging in complex and meaningful literacy events.

Along with a strong theoretical background, the researcher provided clear examples of different media literacy lessons in different curricular contexts. A strong distinction was made between lessons that simply seek to enhance existing curriculum through popular culture texts, and lessons that critically address the context and economics of popular culture texts. Direct quotes from students are provided, though the researcher does not outline how the quotes were collected.

Stevens (2001) offered little insight into possible efforts to improve the credibility or transferability of the different case studies. Because there is no outline of the data collection methods, it is difficult to determine if the direct quotes from participants were generated from recordings, or from memory. There does not seem to be any evidence of member checking, or triangulation. The researcher never made reference to the possible bias inherent in having helped create the interventions with the different teachers. Is it possible that the confirmation bias was at work while seeking evidence of successful integration? Ultimately, this prevents any possible transfer to a different context.

There is potential in a critical media literacy curriculum to tap student engagement and prior knowledge while offering the students an opportunity to seek content across multiple texts. Yet, there remain initial pitfalls that might come into play should students offer up adult-themed popular culture texts when given the opportunity to include their



out-of-school literacies in the classroom. Educators have the opportunity to address these more complex systemic issues, such as sexism, gender roles, and social constructions of sexuality, in these instances. Educators should remain wary of trying to use these same practices in different socio-economic contexts. It appears easier to match up pop culture expectations when students and teachers appear to represent the same ethnicity and socio-economic background.

In an effort to employ the practices included in this research toward improving both traditional and non-traditional literacy practices, Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (1998) studied the use of multimedia interpretative texts as tools for expression and synthesis in working with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The study was a collaboration between a teacher-researcher and a university teacher-researcher. Part teacher research project, part qualitative ethnography, the study combined several different research paradigms to construct the data collection and analysis procedures. The main questions the researcher sought to understand included: What are the consequences of the specific intercontextual framework of the class under study on particular acts of composing within that framework? How do intertextual factors influence specific acts of composing on an intertextual continuum? In what ways does a small-group setting potentially enable exploratory talk to contribute to the production of an interpretive text? In what ways does the production of a multimedia interpretative text enable a particular group of students to compose meaning for a work of literature?

The two observers collected field notes on laptops during the majority of class sessions. These notes were immediately sent to the teacher, Cindy, to confirm and respond to the data. Four of the five groups within the class were tape recorded, and their discussions transcribed at a later point. Other sources of data included the teacher's personal log, the teacher's planning book, and interviews with the students. Collection took

place during two block period classes and one overtime period. The article looks specifically at the process of creating a body biography at the end of a unit on *Hamlet* and the transcribed discussion of a single group interpreting the character of Laertes.

The participants were a single senior group consisting of four females (Courtney, June, Lisa, and Venus) and one male (Troy). The group was chosen because they were neither especially strong nor weak as students. They were also chosen because their social relations and degree of attention to the task were relatively unproblematic, providing a good case scenario. The students attended a large two-year senior high school in the southwestern U.S. Most students were white, with the largest minority groups among the students being Native American and African American.

The researchers observed the group and their central effort to discover meaning in the play through their representation of Laertes by means of graphic and verbal signs. Their body biography served as a meaning-laden artifact that they could consult, reconsider and revise as they produced it. Students developed their understanding of Laertes through efforts to depict him and his relationships in the body biography. Yet, despite the teacher's efforts to facilitate a reader-oriented response to the literature, the group's discussion of the character did not include any personal connections to the characters or discussions of their own related experiences.

Students were not available for member checking, because the coding and analysis of the data took place after the end of the school year. The researchers were unable to account for the history of each participant. Because the study took place over two days, it is possible that the students' understanding and efforts on the project were influenced by events outside school. The range of the tape recorder also prevented a complete picture of the class discussion. The researchers note several instances where the tape recorder failed to pick up certain side conversations. At one point in the article, Smagorinsky makes

mention of the Hawthorne effect and its possible role in motivating students to work harder or perform better. While this may indicate a possible weakness, the researchers situate the problem as a strength that schools should attempt to exploit. If the presence of researchers provides an importance to school activities that motivates students to work harder and possibly learn more, then schools should seek out more research scenarios.

Based on the research and the contributions of this study, multimedia design and creation can serve as a platform to create new understandings of literature that go beyond the traditional New Criticism approaches to Language Arts content. There is potential for improved student learning while attempting to negotiate a shared meaning among peers. Attempting to convey that meaning in a multimedia text, such as a body biography, holds even greater potential for improved understanding. Sadly, this study only highlights a very small example of multimedia design that could create an engaging learning experience.

Taken alongside the other evidence of multiple literacy design in the classroom the findings of this research section point to a meeting between popular culture texts, that traditionally would be marginalized in a Language Arts classroom, and a variety of important literacy practices. The research points to the potential for increased engagement amongst more students in the classroom, and promotes different practices that could be replicated or expanded within an actual public school classroom. This body of research highlights the value of creativity for changing times, contexts, and content. These different interventions also highlight various routes to cultivating critical consciousness in the classroom. This critical consciousness is vital in addressing the next section of research on civic engagement and political socialization of students.

#### The Role of Media Literacy in Civic Education and Engagement

The ability to participate in a community and engage in political discourse is heavily influenced by our ability to critically engage various local and national media outlets, along

with various public forums. The ability to participate in public discussion by actively creating and promoting one's personal forms of communication presents an even greater realm of political participation. Schools have the potential to create spaces where future/current citizens can begin to learn the art of deliberation and political discussion. Language Arts, as a discipline that seeks to cultivate the capacities to communicate effectively across various contexts, is a discipline that implicitly supports the future potential of all citizens to participate actively in the shaping of their communities (locally and nationally).

The research presented here deals with the role of school in the political socialization of youth and the ways schools can help foster a more participatory attitude toward communities and their avenues of decision-making and change. The hope is that the connection to media education might be made clear through a look at the way students understand and engage with a political identity, on a local, state, national, and international level. Studies by Torney-Purta (2002) and Banks and Roker (1994) present the different influences schools possess in fostering positive attitudes toward political participation. They also highlight the different characteristics that might encourage students to take on the identity of citizen, while revealing the differences that socio-economic status fosters in perceptions and likelihood of future political engagement. Both studies present an international perspective. Torney-Purta's article features findings from 28 countries, while Banks and Roker study a public and private school in England.

*The School's Role in Developing Civic Engagement: A Study of Adolescents in Twenty-Eight Countries* centers around the question: What role does formal schooling play in the civic education and engagement process? Torney-Purta (2002) outlines the results from phase two of the IEA Civic Education study, a quantitative multiple-choice test and survey. A Nationally represented sample totaling approximately 90,000 students from the local

grades containing the majority of 14-year-olds were tested in the following countries: Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong (SAR), Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. Countries represented a wide range of social, economic, political, and cultural contexts, along with varying histories of democracy (as it is defined by the study).

Using the data collected from the initial case studies (phase 1 of the research), a content framework was developed around three domains: a) Democracy, Democratic Institutions and Citizenship; b) National Identity and International Relations; and c) Social Cohesion and Diversity. These domains formed the basis of the test and survey construction. The researchers created a multiple-choice test of civic knowledge and of skills in interpreting civic-related information, along with a survey of concepts, attitudes, and behaviors. The test also presented background questions asking about home literacy resources, expected years of further education, and membership in organizations and associations (along with other demographic information). Scales for the data were developed using Item Response Theory methodology in a parallel way in the 28 countries.

The study found that there are multiple modes of citizenship, and that some cultures emphasize different forms of citizenship over others. It was also found that the longer a democratic government exists, the greater the trust in the government among the population becomes. It was also found that a gap exists between more or less economically advantaged students in civic knowledge and engagement. The findings also indicate the influence of socio-economic status in political knowledge and potential/future civic engagement. There is a serious challenge to civic engagement posed by poverty outside and within industrial and developing countries. It was also found that experiencing a climate in

the classroom that encourages respectful discussions of civic and political issues is associated with both civic engagement and sense of engagement. Ultimately three elements of school are important in civic education: the formal curriculum, the culture of the classroom, and the culture of the school.

The research attempts to account for the vast differences that would exist between 28 different countries and their perceptions of civic education and engagement. The study covers a large group of participants and includes countries with very different economies and cultures. For the more conventional conception of democratic participation and civic education the study provides an extensive look at the possibilities for most political practice and knowledge. The scope of the study and the inclusion of such a diverse group of participants offers a strong case for generalizability concerning school practices that might influence civic engagement and political socialization.

The study and the different instruments for data collection present a somewhat limited idea about political participation and civic knowledge. The findings stress conventional conceptions of participation, and fail to include issues of dissent toward the systems and institutions making up the political structure of each country. The study did not focus on the ways that students might have worked to develop a more critical view of the democratic structure in their own countries. The effort to measure some of the more active and participatory democratic practices may not be accurately portrayed in a multiple choice test and accompanying survey.

Given the strengths of the study, it is possible to infer that there are sets of circumstances within a school context that can help provide students with greater opportunities to participate politically in their communities and beyond. The circumstances involve the qualities of an effective class discussion where political topics can be addressed positively. The correlation of higher socio-economic status with greater political

engagement indicates a need to foster greater civic education and engagement among all groups within a country, empowering and enfranchising groups with lower socio-economic status. The study points to the potential of creating inclusive school governing procedures, and the encouragement of even stronger feeling of political efficacy and participation.

Despite these strengths, one should remain cautious about seeking what seems a conventional definition of political engagement within a classroom. It seems that voting and participation in a political organization or party might offer a limited set of political possibilities. The study could go further to discover what some of these different criteria for civic participation actually look like in action.

Banks and Roker (1994), through their look at the possible differences in a public and private education, help highlight the issues of socio-economic status and inclusion of students in school governance raised by Torney-Purta (2002). In *The Political Socialization of Youth: Exploring the Influence of School Experience*, The researchers studied the political attitudes of adolescent girls aged 15-18 from similar home backgrounds, who were being educated in one private day school and one state school in the north of England.

Their research design consisted of two stages: a quantitative questionnaire stage, and a qualitative semi-structured interview stage. The questionnaires from the first stage collected basic demographic information, and included questions exploring a range of political and socio-economic attitudes and orientations. The second stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with a selected sub-sample from the group of questionnaire respondents. The goal was to explore in more detail the political attitudes and orientations of students. Interviews were conducted in participant homes, tape recorded, and lasted between one-and-a-half and three hours. The interview questions were either fixed choice and coded during the interview, or open-ended and coded using a standardized coding frame after the interviews were completed.

Questionnaires were administered to all girls at both schools. Both schools were located in an affluent area of a large city and drew pupils from mainly middle-class professional families. A total of 181 questionnaires were returned from the two schools combined. Interviews were then conducted with 127 girls from similar socio-economic backgrounds, 60 from the state school and 67 from the private school.

The private school samples demonstrated a greater level of interest in politics, a greater level of trust in the political process, a greater belief in the stability of the political system, a high degree of support for the current conservative government, a greater level of knowledge of local politics and a higher level of anticipation of being politically active in the future. The private school sample demonstrated a unique set of political orientations from those demonstrated by previous research samples. Another finding pointed to the possibility of a distinctive experience of a private school education. The study suggests that private schools may exist as a strong socializing agent because of the ability to select pupils, and a high degree of consistency and coherence of values.

The study attempts to create a similar participant sample among the private and state school pupils. Banks and Roker (1994) control for socio-economic status and offer a fairly comprehensive measure of political dispositions and attitudes. By using the qualitative semi-structured interview approach, the researchers were able to offer a more comprehensive and specific look at the types of political attitudes among the participants.

As Banks and Roker (1994) point out there are many struggles in attempting to control for school experience in the political socialization of individual youths. It seems that the idea of a politically active subject can be taken in many different ways, and there are questions about whether Banks and Roker accounted for less conventional approaches to political engagement. The measures of political knowledge can be misleading in attempting to quantify political knowledge. The measures assume a set of expected pieces of



information that would classify a person as 'politically competent.' This demonstrates a socially constructed vision of political knowledge informed by dominant ideologies. The fact that the study takes place in northern England presents issues of transferability. More information is needed regarding the daily school routines of each participant group before any real transfer of the findings could be applied to contexts in the U.S.

From this study, one can recognize that socio-economic status can be a strong indicator of potential political engagement. The role of schools as socializing agents cannot be overlooked. There is a potential in developing an environment/context in which students can learn and practice the skills needed to participate actively in a democratic society. The study helps highlight the possible differences that exist between a private and public education. These characteristics may not necessarily show up on standardized test scores, but point to a difference in future efforts to promote and predict personal/community interests. At the same time, one should remain cautious about assuming the existence of certain political dispositions among future public school students.

To dig further into the idea of what specific classroom contexts might give rise to greater civic engagement, Kiouisis and McDevitt (2006) and Dunsmore and Lagos (2008) explore the possibilities of deliberative learning and video production. Both studies include a look at specific media practices and how they influence an individual's ability to engage in discussion and expression of political beliefs.

*Deliberative Learning: An Evaluative Approach to Interactive Civic Education* describes the testing of three hypothesis developed by Kiouisis and McDevitt (2006):

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Student participation in deliberative instruction is positively associated with attention to news, political knowledge, and issue salience.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Student participation in deliberative instruction is positively associated with the frequency of political conversations with parents and friends and the size of political discussion networks.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Student participation in deliberative instruction is positively associated with students' propensity to openly disagree, to listen to opponents, and to test out opinions in political conversation. (p. 263)

The researchers employed a quantitative quasi-experiment pre/post test design consisting of a survey/interview. The design attempted to create a treatment and control condition, yet the researchers could not assume field conditions for an experiment with clearly contrasting conditions.

Student respondents came from 150 schools located in El Paso County, CO, Maricopa, County, AZ, and Broward/Palm Beach counties, FL. Each region included a presence of Kids Voting USA, a model program for demonstrating how schools can promote peer-centered learning. The K-12, nonpartisan program works through lesson plans that encourage older students to obtain information about candidates and ballot issues during the final weeks of an election campaign. The first stage included interviews of juniors and seniors, along with one parent from each family, immediately following the 2002 election (T1). The second phase included interviews from the same respondents one year later (T2). A total of 288 student-parent dyads completed both the T1 and T2 parts of the study. Given the varying rates of participant cooperation, mobility, and availability, the resulting sample was upwardly biased, under representing low-SES groups and Spanish-speaking parents.

To collect data, interviews were completed with 491 student-parent dyads (982 respondents) for Test 1. The first stage involved telephone interviews, while nonrespondents were followed up with mailed questionnaires. The same procedures were

followed during the second round of interviews one year later. Only 288 dyads completed the second wave of interviews. The researchers measured participation in deliberative instruction as a series of discrete experiences. Exposure to five specific activities was measured with T1; afterwards, the results were then standardized. The five activities were discussion of political issues, debate participation, media literacy, voter registration, family voting. Various outcome measures were performed to judge attention to news, political knowledge, and issue salience.

The researchers discovered data that provided partial support for their first hypothesis. Ultimately, political knowledge, measured through specific interview questions at Test one and Test two, fell off during Test two. For hypothesis two, "Test one results suggest possibilities for systematic, long-term relationships between curricular involvement and interpersonal political communication among parents and friends" (p. 259). The prevalence of classroom discussion offered a clear indicator for potential political talk outside of school with parents and friends.

The findings also offered strong support for hypothesis three, indicating that classroom discussion was another meaningful predictor of willingness to disagree and listen to opponents at test two. The pattern of the findings suggests that deliberative instruction prepared students for enduring receptivity to political stimulation. The measure of these deliberative learning practices involved the cultivation of self-perpetuation habits; "The findings offer hope for interactive education as a catalyst for civic renewal" (p. 262).

McDevitt and Kiouisis (2006) present a strong theoretical background for the research. They are clear about the possible shortcomings of their study, and suggest a clear path for further research regarding the subject. They even call on more qualitative data to be gathered regarding the phenomenon of deliberative learning and its potential to encourage greater political awareness and socialization. Despite the drop off in respondents

from the test one and test two phases, they control for experimental mortality by only including the student-parent dyads that completed both phases of the study. As McDevitt and Kiouisis point out, their samples pull from the Southwest, the Rocky Mountain West, and the southeast, increasing the capacity to make generalized inferences about deliberative learning. Their sample groups are large, and as mentioned above come from 150 schools. The sample sets were controlled for a number of demographics, along with family SES and parental history of voting. The researchers also indicate that they controlled for differences in academic achievement and social experiences such as church attendance. While the potential for generalizability is greater because of their wide sample groups, caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions on the overall learning process.

McDevitt and Kiouisis (2006) express their inability to create conditions for a clear treatment and control sample. They rely on a vague set of principles where the schools involved in Kids Voting USA are presumed to be more involved in the civic education of their students, and that schools without this specific program would inevitably lack the same quality of civic and political education. It is fair to remain skeptical about the interview questions seeking to measure political knowledge. It supposes a very dominant cultural perception of political knowledge having to exist in the realm of federal and state government participation. They fail to consider political knowledge that might exist on a local/community level. The researchers are unable to account for the differences in instruction quality that would inevitably exist among so many different classes and schools. The emphasis placed on class discussion as a tool to build many of these political socialization skills, indicates the need for quality facilitators, aka teachers. Another threat to internal validity mentioned by the researchers involves the social desirability bias, which can be working in self-reports of civic instruction exposure and political involvement.

Given the strength of this study, it is possible to infer that the notion of deliberative educational practices plays a significant role in imagining a media literacy curriculum focused on developing greater civic engagement and political awareness. Civic education, as outlined by McDevitt and Kiouisis (2006), critically connects with a critical media literacy infused curriculum. The majority of statewide, national, and international news is delivered in a mediated form, which demands media literacy skills in determining the use and power of information/news. This study offers a unique take on media literacy. Though it does not seek to measure the gains and value of a media literacy curriculum, the study indicates that a civic renewal can only be achieved through becoming a savvy media consumer. This study confirms the need to further inform curriculums with a strong attention to the effects of media in terms of information dissemination and accuracy.

Despite these potential conclusions, one should remain cautious about imagining the effects of these different surveys as indicative of nationwide political participation following a deliberative civic education. It seems that the principles of deliberative education must be practiced further in various experimental settings. Like the researchers point out, a qualitative look at the effects of classroom discussion in cultivating political discourse skills would be valuable in furthering a wider understanding of the intervention. The evidence could then be held up against the self-reporting of students.

Dunsmore and Lagos (2008) help fill certain parts of this research gap in their study, *Politics, Media and Youth: Understanding Political Socialization via Video Production in Secondary Schools*. Using a qualitative case study/ethnographic design, the study seeks to explore the following questions: What is the relationship of news, politics, and the political engagement of high school students? How does this political engagement demonstrate itself in a video production unit performed in a high school civic education program?

In seeking answers to these questions, the researchers took on the role of participant observers as they presented a video production project, part of a civic education initiative utilizing a pedagogical model informed by media literacy education. The researchers proposed that the classes make a video on a political topic, while offering as much room for freedom of expression and self-determination as possible. Dunsmore and Lagos (2008) observed and talked with students as they developed their scripts, performed them, talked together after the performance, and after they viewed their production. They analyzed the student interactions and ways of speaking, as well as the content of their speech. They collected data through field observations and the videos students produced. The field reports were made immediately after returning from the field. The research was completed over a 10-day period. Participants included members of a high school civic education program, and the classes, “appeared to reflect the overall population composition,” of the school (p. 3).

Despite the results of a previous survey given to the classes, which indicated a lack of political awareness and engagement, the researchers found that, given a validating and interactive environment, students demonstrated a heightened political awareness and understanding. Results demonstrated that the civic engagement of teenagers may fall “outside the channels conventionally measured in political communication surveys” (p. 7). Students also demonstrated a heightened awareness of various television norms, while the production unit provided them an opportunity to reach out into the community to document views on political issues.

The researchers provide some direct examples of students and, often, use their own words. They also present a convincing case regarding the television norms, which the students adhered to during their video filming. Taking into account the purpose of the study, as a way to look below the surface of a quantitative survey measure, there is

convincing evidence that goes beyond the previous perceptions of youth civic engagement. Yet, Dunsmore and Lagos (2008) fail to provide specific information regarding the participant group. They do not offer evidence of any member checking. They employ only two forms of data collection providing a limited account of the proceedings at best. With all of this taken into account, the transferability of the study is questionable. Yet, the study remains credible given the findings of previous studies in this field.

This study demonstrates that given a validating and interactive environment that allows youth to employ their extensive knowledge of media and televised norms, civic engagement and political awareness could be cultivated. It is plausible that given the opportunity to offer their own perspectives on their own terms, youth might readily accept the opportunity to express thoughtful and serious opinions/perspectives. These findings should be taken with caution until further research involving the use of media to further the political awareness of youth can be produced.

In this section, the discussion of political socialization and civic engagement has centered on schools and the role they might play in cultivating the future citizens of this country. At the same time, these studies have sought to understand the different ways students express themselves and their political beliefs. In building a definition of citizenship, it is necessary to emphasize the ability to critically engage the members of your community in thoughtful and positive deliberation as you address the issues and needs of all groups in the community. Media literacy can help foster greater civic engagement and political socialization by preparing students for engagement with the widest/most prolific form of information dissemination, the media. Media literacy might also create opportunities for greater engagement among students from disadvantaged groups. Within a media literacy curriculum, students might create their own media, and offer their voice to the political process on a community and national level.

## Summary

Chapter three offered a critique of the relevant research dealing with media literacy inside and outside the classroom. The first section dealt with the effects of specific Media literacy curriculum interventions. The studies point to the potential for joining media literacy with more traditional literacy practices in Secondary language arts classroom. The findings suggest that the pairing would help improve the skills of both more traditional text-based literacy practices and those associated with more visual and digital literacy practices.

The next section of studies dealt with the use of curriculum interventions focusing on the production and design side of media. The findings suggest that such efforts help shift the perspective of students and provide them the opportunity to take over the means of media production. Instead of simply viewing and critiquing media created by someone else, students are given the opportunity to produce and disseminate their own messages. They are able to make and understand the decisions that shape and influence a media message. Ultimately, media production efforts may rest with a school's ability to acquire the tools that would allow students to produce their own messages. With the growth of digital technologies and more accessible production tools, costs for the means of production may drop dramatically over time.

Joined with the emergence of newer tools for media production, is the explosion of new and digitally mediated out-of-school literacies. The studies investigating the different literacy practices of students outside of school indicate the growing gap between what students are asked to read and write in school and what they choose to read and write outside of school. The findings in the research promote the need for mutual understanding between educator and student. Too often, teachers marginalize newer forms of media within their classroom, in favor of their own personal preferences. In attempting to engage more students in more relevant literacy practices it is imperative that teachers learn to view



their students' out-of-school literacy practices with a greater understanding and appreciation.

The research involving the construction and deconstruction of identity in relation to media helps pinpoint the location at which media becomes more than just a form of entertainment and information. Media has an influence, yet media consumers do exercise choice and some control in the way they choose media to match and help develop their existing identity sets. These findings can inform educators who recognize the need to legitimize all identities that exist in a classroom. Educators can potentially marginalize student identities in their effort to engender a more critical view of the media that students consume on a daily basis. Ultimately, these practices will prove fruitless if students perceive themselves as the victims of a critical educator seeking to deconstruct their favorite media products. Educators can also take the opportunity to investigate their own mediated practices, and gain a deeper understanding of how they relate to the media they interact.

The studies that dealt with pop culture in the classroom indicate other complexities that exist when using popular culture texts in curriculum or instruction. Educators in fields such as science or mathematics can begin recognize the influence that movies have in shaping student perceptions, and perpetuating potential misunderstandings. The texts that students encounter throughout their day can serve as a guide to understanding the content knowledge they might enter the classroom with. Teachers can also perform an investigation of their motivations for using media texts.

The next section of chapter three looked into the merging of pop culture media texts and literacy practices with classroom efforts to develop transferable literacy skills. It was found that such efforts do help develop more complex sets of visual and communication literacy practices, but requires a concerted effort to help students identify and understand the transferability of the literacy practices they are working on.

The final section looked at civic engagement and student perceptions of civic engagement. The findings help identify the ways that students view their role in the world at large, and also point to socio-economic status as a possible indicator for perceptions about one's role in the civic environment of a community, state, or nation. These findings indicate another way that students might be able to evolve their understanding of media. Students with a heightened awareness of civic engagement can move beyond viewing civic engagement as the casting of a ballot every few years. Having an understanding and recognition of the role that media plays in the spread and control of information can allow students to take on an active role as they enter the political realm of their surrounding world.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

### Introduction

Chapter one outlined the focus and direction of this paper including the question that would guide the research throughout the process of synthesizing and writing; How can a media literacy curriculum help transform the literacy practices of a secondary Language Arts classroom, so that they might meet the shifting demands of a digital communication landscape? The changing landscape of media and the potential for even greater change over the next several years highlighted the implications and importance of the question. It proves even more relevant when looking at the dramatic differences between the worlds teachers grew up in versus the one current students are growing up in. Despite the need to promote a more expansive view of reading and writing that incorporates the media and digital communication technologies, there remain points of controversy regarding the use of such technologies and the potential ethical dilemmas they may pose for schools and teachers.

For this research, the term *media* incorporated all forms of mediated communication and experience. This includes any attempt to convey an idea through space and time, and focuses on the potential for all forms of communication to exist as texts for production, construction, and deconstruction. This research, as outlined in Chapter one, seeks to understand the changing landscape of mediated experience. It centers on its validity and the need to rethink current approaches to media literacy within a new literacies framework that makes use of the collaborative, participatory, and creative potentials emerging from new digital tools of communication. The paper does not seek to outline *all* the possible classroom practices that could inform a media literacy focus, but it does seek to offer ways a Secondary Language Arts teacher may investigate their own assumptions about literacy while building a relevant and meaningful classroom space that fosters critical investigation and understandings.

Chapter two looked at the historical context and developments that surrounded the study of media and its growth over the past one hundred years. Media studies became a serious academic field around the 1930's as more and more individuals began to concern themselves with the perceived influence of media on large groups of people. Having witnessed the use of mass propaganda techniques by the major warring powers involved in World War II, many began to investigate these techniques and the mediums that served as the avenue for distribution.

The notion of media literacy education within public schools began to gain ground in many western industrialized countries around the 1960's. The development of a coordinated movement for greater attention to media literacy education did not really take place in the United States until the late 70's and early 80's. Ultimately, the challenges such efforts faced within the United States may have involved a concerted effort to prevent the rise of an overly critical consumer population. It was not until 1993, that the first unified movement gathered at the Aspen Institute to put forth a plan for research and the promotion of media literacy programs nationwide. Since then, efforts to build further support for media literacy in public schools have continued to gain serious ground. Yet, the landscape of media communication evolves and changes dramatically over the same time, and it may be that the notion of media literacy lags behind.

This chapter will summarize the findings from Chapter three, and will then proceed to discuss the practical implications and applications for incorporating new practices and perceptions into the Secondary Language arts classroom. The chapter will point to developments in the way teachers might be able to think about reading and writing practices in the classroom and how those practices might be able to mirror and complicate that students practice outside of school. The recommendations will also center on the need to incorporate a more participatory and communal sense of writing and reading. It will also

provide a rationale for focusing more on student production and student generated media as a source for deconstructing and utilizing more traditional media literacy concepts.

The chapter will conclude with the author's suggestions for further research in the field. Given that the vast range of research performed in the social sciences contains certain intrinsic limitations, there exists a range of directions and issues that should be researched as the supporters of media literacy look to find further evidence to support their efforts in the realm of policymaking. Finally, the author will offer up concluding remarks involving the significant findings of the paper and the effect these findings could have on future teaching practices.

#### Summary of Findings

Chapter three highlighted and critiqued the major body of research surrounding different notions of media literacy and the connected fields of multiple and out-of-school literacy practices. Along with these fields, chapter three investigated the connection of political socialization to media literacy curriculum. The following is a synthesis of the findings that could be drawn from the research. Viewed as a connected group, the research involved a wide range of ages and school grades. Students in elementary school were involved in certain studies, along with middle grades, high school students, college students, and even college/university professors. Certain studies turned the lens on teachers and investigated their own perceptions and practices in relation to their use of media in the classroom, and their efforts to understand more critical perspectives on literature and media. The research also covered a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, as well as, a strong collection of different geographic locations. Students from Egypt and Australia were among the many other countries involved in different studies. Students from both Urban and Rural environments, public and private schools appeared in the research. Most of these studies,

and the various cultural contexts in which they were performed, were limited to an industrialized context with accompanying commercial media.

When looking through the findings from chapter three, one trend that does become apparent involves the studies that present a clear and convincing set of findings that offer a practical direction for actual classroom application. The studies that offer the most convincing picture of media literacy and various out-of-school literacy practices are generally qualitative in nature. Many of the researchers ground their findings and data in their own observations and perceptions. Certain studies that attempt to quantify and measure a set of specific skills and desired outcomes often appear misguided in their choice of measures and variables. The shortcomings of these research designs and methods hinder their ability to present clear and relevant findings.

The initial findings from the research present a clear picture of the different ways students interact with and consume different media. Communities have emerged around the new digital communication technologies and students are participating in emerging conversation. Younger generations already possess the new literacies and skills that many of today's educators lack. Yet, the classroom could help create communities among students and encourage participation; students sharing knowledge with other students, and building a collection of shared skills that could be used for individual and collective expression. The classroom could encourage a movement to engage critically with the practices of daily media consumption.

As the quantitative study from Foehr, et al (2005) indicates, the interactions with television are changing. Youth are beginning to mix their television consumption with time spent on the Internet engaging in practices and content related to the different television programs. This practice highlights the changing dimension of mass media interaction, and

could help clarify this transformation of passive television consumer into active digital explorer (Lankshear and Knobel 2008).

The findings of Fisherkeller (2000), along with Tisdell and Thompson (2007), indicate the deeper effects of media interaction. Student identity is tied up with media interaction. They participate in complex set of negotiations in their attempt to carve out this identity (Chandler-Olcott 2003, Lewis and Fabos 2005). This identity is important and should not become the target of a teacher's effort to create a critical awareness of personal media choices. However, Educators should not shy away from moving classes toward a critically conscious investigation of their personal experience within a broader context of the many political and cultural systems that influence it. The research indicates the need for a more nuanced approach to creating a self-reflective awareness of personal media consumption. This transformation is not instantaneous and should be allowed to come about through careful investigation and individual self-determination.

The changing role of student and teacher, as students continue to build on their insider knowledge, leaves teachers to play catch-up. More specifically educators must become a student alongside the rest of their class. The changing nature of literacy education, and media literacy, indicates a need for educators to develop an understanding of these emerging literacies even as they continue to proliferate at a rapid rate. Though, participation in the kind of communal and collaborative practices found in cyberspace provides the optimal opportunity to share and understand different out-of-school literacy practices. Educators may need to understand these literacies if they intend to encourage students toward a more critical perspective.

As Lewis and Ketter (2008) indicate, educators have their own personal investigation. They must seek to understand the paradigmatic shift taking place through digital technologies and the evolution of human reading and writing (Lankshear and Knobel

2008). They must also investigate their own biases and the ways their perceptions are inevitably shaped by their outsider status (Sadik 2008, Frost and Hobbs 1998, Savage 2008). Educators must first seek to understand before condemning. Condemning the digital and multiple literacies students bring into class serves only to widen the gap between the students and their schooling, ensuring the continued spiral of public education toward obsolescence.

The research in chapter three points to the lack of critical components in the literacies that students do possess (Sanford and Madill, 2007; Lewis and Fabos, 2005; Damico and Fuller, 2008). This offers a position where teachers may provide a new and needed perspective. Again, this requires teachers to first understand these literacies. Yosso (2008) highlighted an approach that might raise critical media awareness, but as the findings indicate does not guarantee the recognition of systemic inequities. Despite these supposed shortcomings Yosso helps indicate a starting position for secondary students as they seek a metalanguage with which to understand their literacy practices.

By incorporating texts that range across different mediums, and raising issues of representation, language, audience and production, digital media can be subjected to a class critique and open discussion. Buckingham (2008) indicates just where this critical component should begin; "Education *about* the media should be seen as an indispensable prerequisite for education *with or through* the media" (p. 73). These different options depend on a teacher's ability to provide space for students to offer up different texts. At the same time, these texts should be treated with an open and non-judging approach in class discussion. This approach would acknowledge the identity attachments and pleasure that all individuals have in connection with their media participation.

Feuerstein (1999) provided evidence of students reflecting critically on their work as they investigated different class productions during and after the completion of the



project. Using students multimodal, digital texts as objects for understanding can enhance the creative and critical exchange. Walsh (2007) and participant students offered critical readings of the class textbook. As highlighted in the study, the groups uncovered gaps and silences surrounding the Great Depression and the Harlem Renaissance. If these approaches could be translated into other contexts, students might begin to cultivate one of the strongest understandings in their approach to media.

The research presents a clear case for joining the theoretical discussion of media texts, with student production. Digital media offers students and educators the opportunity to engage their creative and artistic faculties to create a message that employs a range of modalities (Lynch 2007, Bruce 2007, Walsh 2007, Feuerstein 1999, Chu 1997, Sadik 2008). On top of that, the need to learn the skills and critical understandings involved in participation in the digital collaborative community requires that students have a chance to spend prolonged amounts of time on the internet. This time should be spent engaging in the practices and participating in the different forms of creative composition. The use of class wikis, student blogging, and multimodal digital texts are all ways to build a classroom community that exists in physical space and cyberspace. A balance must exist between the benefits of collaborative group work and an individual student's need to spend time using the internet and learning with the tools of communication and creation.

Storytelling, another important element of multimodal creation, serves to bridge new literacies with traditional language arts content. The weaving of narratives can happen in so many varied forms, and Sadik's (2008) investigation of digital storytelling highlights the benefits of practices that encourage students to expand and cultivate their creative storytelling faculties. These different approaches to storytelling also provide a platform where students who might struggle with traditional approaches to storytelling, or suffer

from anxiety when it comes to producing creatively on a piece of blank paper, can experiment in expressing themselves in different writing contexts.

The efforts of researchers chronicling new and multiple literacies point to the need for an expanded idea of what we, as educators, count as reading and writing (Alvermann 2001, Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003, Lewis and Fabos 2005, Chu 1997, Damico and Fuller 2008, Foehr et al. 2005, Sanford and Madill 2007). Often, the restrictive nature of a school's definition of those terms immediately sets some students at a disadvantage simply because their literacy practices do not fall within the sanctioned realm of reading and writing print-based literacy. This is not to say that those students should not take part in efforts to expand their literacy repertoire. It simply means that labeling and marginalizing students through classroom practices that privilege traditional literacy approaches should not remain the norm. Students can be given the opportunity to translate their existing literacy practices to new, and more school-based, reading and writing practices (Lewis and Fabos, 2005; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003).

The studies highlighted above indicate different ways that students practice literacy outside of class, while also pointing to practices that are rarely, if ever, sanctioned within the public school classroom. Yet, these practices are a rich realm of understandings that students should cultivate and understand. Many studies demonstrate approaches that engage all students, including those who have found themselves marginalized by the literacy practices of conventional school (Bruce 2007, Alvermann 2001).

There is the suggestion in many of the findings from chapter three that even these wider approaches to literacy are not entirely opposed to the traditional literacy practices of school. They could serve as scaffolding for school-sanctioned traditional forms of reading and writing (Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen, 1998; Walsh, 2007). The two approaches can mutually inform each other as students develop a wider understanding of the changing

shape of reading and writing. These understandings will serve them in their future where the potential of continuing media convergence creates a new set of demands and abilities. Hobbs and Frost (2003) indicate that a media literacy infused curriculum will help students recognize the complex blurring of information, entertainment, and economics that are present in contemporary nonfiction media.

The research for this project also sought to explore the issue of political socialization, and the other means by which students learn (or unlearn) the skills offered as participation in our current form of democracy. The issues of media literacy and civic engagement are intimately linked. Students can produce their own media in an attempt to add their own perspective and voice to local or national issues (Chu, 1997). At the same time, they can learn to move beyond the dominant media perspectives and embrace a range of information/media sources. The research provided several different possibilities to imagine in working to create a classroom that encourages students to take part in their communities, and to participate in ways that may not fall within the traditional realm of civic engagement (Dunsmore and Lagos, 2008).

A relevant and meaningful finding that arose from this section revealed the need for a classroom to encourage and foster positive deliberation and discussion (Kioussis and McDevitt, 2006). Students who felt most comfortable in expressing their views, and who felt that their view was validated within the classroom dialogue were more likely to continue their development as political beings. While this perspective appears common sense, it is important to keep in mind the ways students react to difficult or challenging issues. It is also important to think about the civil and uncivil ways that adults engage in political discourse. When educators focus their attention on positive classroom deliberation and discussion, students are able to learn new ways of interaction and co-existence. Fostering this type of discussion serves many ends in a classroom that seeks to remain student-centered, and

helping students recognize the need for civil debate, instead of personal attacks, may be one of the most important lessons in civic engagement a student might receive.

### Implications for Teaching

Public school classrooms that seek to create an inclusive student-centered environment should recognize and attempt to legitimize the various identities that students bring along with them. This goal should be central to any media literacy curriculum, and should involve an understanding of student out-of-school literacies. To achieve this, teachers can first begin with themselves. Educators need not give themselves over to a glowing endorsement of everything new and digital on the Internet. But, to truly transform the secondary language arts classroom into a dynamic and collaborative environment where students critically investigate and produce their own multimodal texts, teachers need to seek and understand the range of literacy practices their students engage with. This requires a state of mind that comes to learn, not instruct. For many teachers this could be a shift in roles. This shift also requires time and a concerted effort. Teachers must attempt to immerse themselves in learning to use blogs. They should seek out different message boards and observe the practices that they find. Students are writing and reading at an enormous rate on the Internet (Lewis and Fabos, 2005; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003). The only problem is that these digital literacy practices are rarely legitimated in the classroom, and are often marginalized in favor of more traditional reading and writing practices.

Media literacy as envisioned in the Language Arts classroom should not just be about the study of media artifacts and how they are produced, but should involve as its foundation and emphasis the generation of media texts and digital artifacts. Students can begin to participate in the media discourse, asking the questions of the community and taking on the challenge of mediating information or experience for an audience or group of

individuals. With this foundation media literacy incorporates a sociocultural perspective on new literacies and can incorporate what Lankshear and Knobel (2008) identify as an insider, web 2.0 mindset. This mindset envisions the collective production of knowledge in a more participatory user-generated forum, offering students experience in the necessary deliberation practices of collective decision-making and political or democratic participation.

One of the biggest ways to achieve this level of interaction and engagement would be to provide access and time on a computer, or a device that can offer students a chance to access the Internet. By utilizing time in class to engage with the different literacy potentials on the Internet, students have the chance to learn from those with more advanced understandings of these new digital technologies. To extend these practices further, teachers can incorporate a range of interactive and participatory digital forums available for no charge on the Internet. Blogs, Wikis, and shared Google Documents can become collaborative, living documents that can be shaped by a group of students or a whole class. A discussion can extend beyond the classroom and does not have to end within the confines of a rigid classroom period. Such practices encourage students to collect and organize their thoughts for display. Even on a message board, class wiki, or blog, the goals remain the same as other classroom writing. Students must practice communicating their thoughts clearly and concisely. They must understand their purpose and effectively use the available space to convey their meanings and ideas. By utilizing these different digital forums for communication, students learn to adapt the different skills they already possess through growing up in a generation surrounded by the Internet.

Allowing students to interact and engage through the newer digital communication technologies also allows those students who do not have home access to the Internet a chance to learn and engage in these environments. As students begin to use these

technologies more and more, educators can pose reflective questions to students that push them to think critically about their experience in these mediated forums. Through thoughtful questioning, students can articulate their view of the media surrounding them throughout the day. The educator's role in these learning opportunities centers on offering experiences and posing questions. Engaging this critical component is crucial in developing a truly balanced perspective on media and mediated experience. Students should not be afraid to question the use of media, and the need for it in their lives.

To further the opportunities for students to produce their own media messages, educators should envision projects that provide the room for students to pursue creation with multiple mediums. Providing projects that combine website design with video production is an essential part of a classroom that seeks to expand the notion of media literacy. These student generated media messages can then become the artifacts by which educators can encourage a more critical understanding among students. By inviting students to contemplate the decisions made in presenting the information to other people, educators can help students further understand the ways media can influence the way a message is received or perceived by an audience. Allowing students to hear about the audience experience from their own classmates provides a chance for students to understand how messages can be interpreted in many different ways by a group of people. No one person will interpret a media message in the same way. This opens up a possibility for discussion on the influence of personal experience and understanding. It also allows students to unpack stereotypes and the ways media can reinforce or subvert accepted cultural norms.

In creating their own media messages students can be encouraged to recreate and reinterpret cultural messages and images they have experienced while consuming media on a daily basis. Lawrence Lessig (2008) detailed the way students will learn to create and use

the culture they have grown-up involved in and connected to. His work is dedicated to promoting an understanding of the *remix* culture. Though not directly addressed in many of the studies dealing with production, many findings in this paper point overwhelmingly to students employing available content to create something new. Remixing is taking the existing range of available messages and creating your own message. Lankshear and Knobel (2008) documented this phenomenon in their look at Internet memes and online fan fiction communities. As Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) demonstrated with their case studies on two girls and their 'tech-saviness,' online fan fiction communities participate in original and collaborative remixing practices.

The practice of remixing raises many interesting debates and concerns that will shape the future for students and their ability to make use of the cultural artifacts surrounding them. As Lessig (2008) pointed out, remixing has brought copyright laws, intellectual property, and the terms of fair use into a new light. In an effort to encourage a debate on our nation's approach to creativity, documentary filmmaker Brett Gaylor (2009) issued 'a remix manifesto:' 1) Culture always builds on the past, 2) The Past always tries to control the future, 3) Our Future is becoming less free, 4) To build free societies you must limit the control of the past. This manifesto highlights the potential struggles awaiting the future generations who attempt to make use of remixing. By presenting this topic to students, it allows them to understand the unseen layers of influence that function to stifle or encourage creative expression. This topic provides ample opportunity to approach critical issues of media, while encouraging students to seek an understanding of the political economy that influences the distribution of media. Students have the opportunity to engage a critical understanding of the media they may never encounter while pursuing their own media interests outside of school. At the same time, these efforts don't attempt to ridicule or marginalize practices or preferences students enter the classroom with.

Despite the push for greater integration of digital technologies within the classroom, there is a recognition from the author that these practices are not the only change that needs to be made. Educators and students will need to engage in discussion and dialogue, while working collaboratively to create and generate meaning. These two important practices can be cultivated in a range of different ways while in a public school classroom. They are not the exclusive domains of digital technologies and media production. What appears most important is the state of mind students use to approach media. It is this foundation of perception that highlights the ways individuals may or may not interact with their surroundings.

These implications for classroom practice make use of current media literacy curriculum. Practices of investigating and producing media messages, while encouraging their application to digital communication technologies, help create a comprehensive view of the media as existing in all different aspects of cultural life. Once educators embrace this view it will become apparent that a media literacy curriculum can exist within every activity in a Language Arts classroom. It is more about investigating a message and the way it is presented. It is about reimagining messages and engaging your own voice in the creation process. Media consumers must become critical creators of media messages. Educators have the opportunity to release students from the demands of an outdated print media curriculum, and move toward a modern inclusion of all forms of communication and transmission. Images, sounds, digital production mediums, body language, and text all have the potential to help students become more informed citizens and creators of their own media. Many students already engage in these practices, but an educator can help them realize the value and potential of such skills by encouraging students to include and expand upon them while in the Language Arts classroom.



## Suggestions for Further Research

The following section offers suggestions for further research in the field of media education and multiple literacies. Given that the scope of research covered in this paper was rather wide, the next step for those seeking to further their understanding of media and its potential position in public school curriculum should be to extend and prolong their focuses. Chronicling long-term media literacy interventions and the possible changing perceptions over time in students would help highlight benefits beyond a simple multiple choice test. Researchers should look to integrate more multiple literacy interventions into their studies in an effort to mirror the changing media landscape. This focus might then approach the way different media focuses might help improve basic and critical reading skills among all students.

The study of movies and science misunderstandings performed by Barnett et al. (2006), presents an important issue that deserves further research. Media have a strong influence on the way individual's perceive and think about the world. It also presents a great deal of information, while neglecting many stories and events that fall under the radar. Further research should seek to understand the ways student misunderstandings are propagated through media interaction.

For many of the studies, the issue of individual teacher aptitude remained one of the variables that researchers failed to properly account for. Given this weakness, future research should seek to create interventions that are observed across many different schooling contexts. In an effort to control for teacher presentation, researchers should create interventions that allow for multiple teachers to provide positive and meaningful results.

To more fully understand the difference between what Hobbs (2006) identified as optimal and non-optimal uses of media in the classroom, further research should pursue

these different practices. The research should also focus on the ways these different practices affect student achievement, positively or negatively.

### Conclusion

Chapter one detailed the foundation for this research on media. Between the sheer abundance of media, and the fact that students today spend over eight hours engaged in some form of mediated experience, an effort to understand and use a media literacy focus within the language arts classroom seems only natural (Foehr et al. 2008). Given that the media landscape will continue to change over time, the need to encourage student thinking beyond the evolving mediated world around them is of the utmost importance. Ultimately, the controversies and perceived pitfalls of incorporating media texts, media production, and out-of-school literacy practices into a classroom, should not outweigh the potential benefits in helping students learn to critically produce and consume the various tools of potential meaning-making.

In understanding the changes that have taken place in media literacy and media studies, chapter two offered a historical context for the research presented here in this paper. Through the discussion of various schools of thought regarding media and its impact, chapter two highlighted the significant theories of media that currently guide many media literacy efforts. The look at the development of media literacy initiatives worldwide also highlighted the failure of the U.S. to keep up with developing media literacy trends throughout much of the 1950's, 60's, and 70's. The creation of a unified voice in media literacy education at the Aspen Institute in 1993 helped establish further research initiatives, along with central goals and definitions for educators and policymakers.

Chapter three outlined the various research focuses over the past twenty years involving media literacy. The research detailed the out-of-school literacy practices of students, possible media literacy or multimodal interventions in classrooms, the use of

popular culture in encouraging student engagement, the pitfalls in using certain media as an end in and of itself, and the political socialization and civic engagement of students. The research while offering a wide range of perspectives did lean toward the qualitative.

The final chapter in this project indicated the need for teachers to rethink their perceptions of literacy. Because literacy is a socially constructed and historically-situated term that changes with the available modes of meaning making in a culture, educators should move beyond existing conceptions to incorporate newer digital media and communication technologies. Teachers must also acknowledge the reading and writing that students perform outside of school as they engage with topics and ideas close to their interests. Teachers have the ability to help students think more critically about the media they consume on a daily basis, but they must avoid marginalizing the identities students construct out of their media consumption. Ultimately, by joining student-generated media messages with more participatory and collaborative digital forums for expression on the Internet, educators can help students move beyond the mediated interaction of their everyday life. Educators can help complicate the issues tied up in media, and encourage students to cultivate their own voice within the mediated landscape.

If public schools are to remain a relevant institution, they must learn to embrace emerging trends and the changing world. The author does not suggest that schools throw themselves after technology, holding it up as a panacea. Instead educators, administrators, and policy makers should seek to understand the states of mind and worldviews that help individuals integrate new technologies into their lives more effectively. They should seek a curriculum that empowers students with the ability to use their voice, and use it in a meaningful forum. In helping students to make use of the meaning making tools around them, educators can cultivate a spirit of collaboration and contribution, which, when joined with a genuine sense of community, can move a generation toward deliberation. A

generation can seek a dialogue across the mediated landscape despite the din of outdated talking heads and opinion-makers.

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