



CORE PRINCIPLES OF MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

**The purpose of media literacy education is to help
individuals of all ages
develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression
that they need to be critical thinkers,
effective communicators and active citizens
in today's world.**

www.AMLAinfo.org

INTRODUCTION

The AMLA is excited to offer to educators, advocates and allies these Core Principles of Media Literacy Education. In crafting them, the writers have built upon on previous scholarship in media literacy as well as communications, education, media and film studies, public health and psychology.

We honor those who provided this rich intellectual heritage while also recognizing that much has changed in the decades since the term "media literacy" first came into use. In responding to those changes, this document shifts the focus of the discussion from what we believe to be true *about media* to what we believe to be true *about how people learn to think critically*. It expands the boundaries of the field to encompass not only *what* we teach but also *how* we teach, thereby distinguishing these as Core Principles of "media literacy education" rather than solely key concepts of "media literacy."

We believe that these Core Principles articulate a common ground around which media literacy educators and advocates can coalesce. The AMLA is committed to using the Core Principles as a springboard for vibrant and ongoing dialogue, and as a first step in the development of clear, measurable outcomes and benchmarks. We invite you to actively join in that conversation at events like the National Media Education Conference and online at www.AMLAinfo.org.

1. Media Literacy Education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION:

- insists on strong sense critical thinking, i.e., asking questions about *all* media messages, not just those with which we may disagree.
- trains students to use document-based and well-reasoned evidence to support their conclusions.
- requires that teachers routinely foster critical thinking and that institutional structures support critical thinking in all classrooms.
- affirms that the foundation of effective media analysis is the recognition that:
 - 1. All media messages are "constructed."**
 - 2. Each medium has different characteristics, strengths, and a unique "language" of construction.**
 - 3. Media messages are produced for particular purposes.**
 - 4. All media messages contain embedded values and points of view.**
 - 5. People use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.**
 - 6. Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process.**
- teaches students the kind of questions they can ask to gain a deeper or more sophisticated understanding of media messages. Examples of questions are on the next page.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IS NOT:

- replacing students' perspectives with someone else's (your own, a teacher's, a media critic's, etc.)
- sharing a critique of media without also sharing skills so students can critically analyze media for themselves.
- teaching students to think critically without also teaching skills of expression.
- teaching the technical skills needed to make media without also teaching critical thinking.
- using media literacy videos, films, books or other curriculum materials as a substitute for teaching critical inquiry skills.
- simply using media in the classroom.
- asking IF there is a bias in a particular message (since all media messages are biased), but rather, what the substance, source, and significance of a bias might be.
- about accepting oversimplifications or overgeneralizations about media or any other topic.
- about restricting or reducing complex debates to two sides.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN ANALYZING MEDIA MESSAGES

USING THIS GRID

The questions in this grid are a model to help people analyze media messages in sophisticated and thoughtful ways. Because instructional practices must be modified appropriately for learners of different ages and in different settings, the process of critical questioning and the specific wording of questions may vary. Some questions may not apply to every media message, and questions will often have more than one answer. As with all critical questioning processes, the end goal is to enable students to regularly ask the questions themselves.

AUTHORS & AUDIENCES	AUTHORSHIP	Who made this message?
	PURPOSE	Why was this made?
		Who is the target audience (and how do you know)?
	ECONOMICS	Who paid for this?
	IMPACT	Who might benefit from this message? Who might be harmed by it?
Why might this message matter to me?		
MESSAGES & MEANINGS	CONTENT	What is this about (and what makes you think that)?
		What ideas, values, information, and/or points of view are overt? Implied?
		What is left out of this message that might be important to know?
REPRESENTATIONS & REALITY	TECHNIQUES	What techniques are used?
		Why were those techniques used? How do they communicate the message?
REPRESENTATIONS & REALITY	INTERPRETATIONS	How might different people understand this message differently?
		What is my interpretation of this and what do I learn about myself from my reaction or interpretation?
REPRESENTATIONS & REALITY	CONTEXT	When was this made?
		Where or how was it shared with the public?
REPRESENTATIONS & REALITY	CREDIBILITY	Is this fact, opinion, or something else?
		How credible is this (and what makes you think that)?
		What are the sources of the information, ideas, or assertions?

2. Media Literacy Education expands the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION:

- encompasses analysis of and expression in all media forms, including traditional print, audio, visual, electronic, digital, user-generated, and cellular media.
- intersects with other literacies, i.e., is distinct from but shares many goals and techniques with print, visual, technology, information, and other literacies.
- takes place in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to: schools, after school programs, online, universities & colleges, religious institutions, and the home.
- should be taught across the pre-K-12 curriculum, in every place that print literacy is traditionally taught as well as in places where formal literacy instruction has not traditionally been included.
- enables students to express and communicate their own ideas through multiple forms of media production.
- helps students make connections between comprehension and inference-making in print, visual, and audio media.
- welcomes the use of a broad range of media “texts,” including popular media.
- recognizes that evolving media forms, societal changes, and institutional structures require ever new instructional approaches and practices.
- supports the equipping of classrooms with the tools to both analyze and produce media and rejects a Luddite approach or blanket opposition to media technologies.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IS NOT:

- a political movement; it is an educational discipline or approach.
- focused on changing “the media,” but rather on changing educational practice and increasing students’ knowledge and skills.

3. Media Literacy Education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION:

- requires more than a single event, class, day or even week-long intervention.
- encourages and benefits from co-learning pedagogies, in which teachers learn from students, and students learn from teachers and from classmates.
- builds skills that encourage healthy lifestyles and decision making.
- teaches media management in a way that helps students learn to make informed decisions about time spent using media and which media they choose to use.
- seeks to provide students with numerous and diverse opportunities to practice and develop skills of analysis and expression.
- engages students with varied learning styles.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IS NOT:

- about inoculating people against presumed or actual harmful media effects.
- making decisions for other people about media access or content.
- a “have it or not” competency, but rather an ever evolving continuum of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and actions.

4. Media Literacy Education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION:

- is respectful of diverse points of view.
- values independently produced media.
- promotes student interest in news and current events as a dimension of citizenship.
- explores representations, misrepresentations and lack of representation of cultures and countries in the global community.
- can enhance student understanding of First Amendment rights and responsibilities.
- recognizes that *HOW* we teach matters as much as *WHAT* we teach:
 - ♦ In order to promote democracy, it is important to embody principles of democracy in our classrooms.
 - ♦ Classrooms should be places where student input is respected, valued and acted upon.
- gives students the skills they need to take responsibility for their own media use.
- leaves students feeling empowered, not cynical.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IS NOT:

- partisan.
- media bashing, i.e., simplistic, rhetorical, or over-generalized attacks on some types of media or media industries as a whole.
- a substitute for government regulation of media.
- a substitute for media taking responsibility to serve the public interest.
- a call for censorship.

5. Media Literacy Education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION:

- integrates media texts that present diverse voices, perspectives and communities.
- includes opportunities to examine alternative media and international perspectives.
- addresses topics like violence, gender, sexuality, racism, stereotyping and other issues of representation.
- shares with media owners, producers, and members of the creative community responsibility for facilitating mutual understanding of the impact of media on individuals and on society.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION DOES NOT:

- start from a premise that media are inconsequential.
- start from the premise that media are a problem.
- excuse media makers from their responsibility as members of the community to serve the public interest, make a positive contribution, and avoid doing harm.

6. Media Literacy Education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION:

- helps students become aware of and reflect on the meaning they are making of media messages, including how the meaning they make relates to their own values.
- helps students express and clarify their own perspectives.
- gives students opportunities to explore texts and the contexts that contribute to the way they interpret media.
- recognizes that students' interpretations of media texts may differ from the teacher's interpretation without being wrong.
- uses group discussion and analysis of media messages to help students understand and appreciate different perspectives and points of view.
- recognizes and welcomes the different media experiences of individuals of varying ages.
- facilitates growth, understanding and appreciation through an examination of tastes, choices and preferences.

THEREFORE MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION IS NOT:

- about teaching students what to think; it's about teaching them how they can arrive at informed choices that are most consistent with their own values.
- about revealing to students the "true" or "correct" or "hidden" meaning of media messages; analysis is an exploration of riches, rather than right readings.
- about identifying which media messages are "good" and which ones are "bad."
- asking students to replace their own judgment with the opinion of an "expert."

ENDORSEMENTS

If you or your institution would like to be listed as an official endorser of this document, please send an e-mail to MediaLitEd AT earthlink.net. Please write "MLE Core Principles endorsement" in the subject line.

AMLA's Core Principles of Media Literacy Education were developed jointly by: Lynda Bergsma, University of Arizona; David Considine, Appalachian State University; Sherri Hope Culver, Temple University; Renee Hobbs, Temple University; Amy Jensen, Brigham Young University; Faith Rogow, Insighters Educational Consulting; Elana Yonah Rosen, Just Think Foundation; Cyndy Scheibe, Ithaca College; Sharon Sellers-Clark, Wayne State University; Elizabeth Thoman, Center for Media Literacy

Approved by the AMLA Board of Directors, April 2007