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Instructional Practices in Media Literacy Education and their Impact on Students' Learning

Renee Hobbs and Richard Frost [1]

This study reports the findings of qualitative and quantitative research designed to assess the impact of different types of instructional practices involving media literacy education across the curriculum. Teachers in a small school district participated in a staff development program in media literacy and developed unique approaches for integrating media literacy concepts into language arts, history, math and science at the ninth grade level. The work of four different teams of ninth grade teachers is described by examining the instructional practices, motivations and philosophy behind teachers' application of media literacy concepts into the curriculum. In addition, students exposed to these different forms of media literacy education were tested on specific media analysis skills, including the ability to identify main ideas, the message's purpose, point of view, and various structural features of a news broadcast. Students who received a balance of media analysis and media production experiences, who used film and video frequently in the classroom and who did not rely exclusively on off-the-shelf prepared media literacy curriculum performed better in measures of media analysis which involved the deconstruction of a segment of television news programming. Results also showed that classrooms which engaged in more extensive and comprehensive approaches to integrating media literacy skills into existing curriculum had students with higher levels of information processing skills including recall and comprehension of ideas presented in a video.

Media literacy educational interventions have been rising in prominence during the 1990s, and a number of school-based programs have begun to emerge in New Mexico, North Carolina, Massachusetts and other states. Recently, the National Communication Association developed a set of standards which included media literacy skills alongside of speaking and listening skills (Berko, 1996). Media literacy emphasizes the skills of analyzing, evaluating and creating media and technology messages which make use of language, moving images, music, sound effects and other techniques (Hobbs, 1997). Recently, the State of Texas included media literacy skills within the framework of language arts instruction, and as a result, there has been increased momentum in exploring how to include media analysis and media production in K-12 classrooms.

Media literacy in K-12 environments generally feature activities which, minimally, invite students to reflect on and analyze their own media consumption habits; to identify author, purpose and point of view in films, commercials, television and radio programs, magazine and newspaper editorials and

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advertising; to identify the range of production techniques that are used to communicate point of view and shape audience response; to identify and evaluate the quality of media's representation of the world by examining patterns of representation, stereotyping, emphasis and omission in print and television news and other media; to appreciate the economic underpinnings of mass media industries; to make distinctions between those media which sell audiences to advertisers and those which do not; to understand how media economics shapes message content; and to gain familiarity and experience in using mass media tools for personal expression and communication and for purposes of social and political advocacy (Hobbs, 1994).

In the United States, despite all the rhetoric, most school-based media literacy initiatives have been based on the efforts of a single teacher in a school or district, working alone. It has generally been difficult to sustain district-level or even school-wide initiatives in media literacy over time. A history of the first phase of implementing "critical viewing skills" instruction in the 1980s revealed that only four school districts in the United States had attempted to develop media literacy skills education (Brown, 1991), and most evaluation models examined the program outcomes on very small numbers of students, usually a single classroom (Anderson, 1980). In the late 1990s, the authors are aware of only a handful of new district-wide initiatives in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Michigan, and New Mexico. Research on media literacy continues to be constrained with so few large-scale implementations available for observation and evaluation.

Focus on Staff Development versus Curriculum Development

The difficulty of sustaining media literacy programs in K-12 environments may be due to both the long-term investment and short-term challenges associated with giving teachers the specific knowledge and skills they need in order to integrate media literacy into existing instructional contexts. In the 1990s, scholars working in the field of media literacy education began to move towards a focus on staff development as a means to implement media literacy instruction in schools, in contrast to earlier work in the United States which had emphasized curriculum development and/or the creation of print and non-print materials for use by teachers in schools (Brown, 1991). Media education advocates in the United States have historically emphasized curriculum and materials development, not teacher education. There have been a substantial number of curricula and materials designed to develop media literacy skills created since the early 1970s (Center for Media Literacy, 1992, 1995; Corder-Bolz, 1982; Ploghoff & Anderson, 1982; Singer & Singer, 1983), with these resources largely consisting of print and video materials designed for a teacher to use with students.

However, as Hart (1992) notes, "a teacher with resources is not necessarily a resourceful teacher" (p. 99). Many media education resource materials become quickly out of date, require enormous investments of time on the part of the teacher, and too easily intimidate busy teachers. According to Hart, much effective media education work can be implemented without using off-the-shelf materials, but simply by using "found" resources from readily available mass media sources. This method of teaching depends on a continuing investment in initial teacher education as well as on-going in-service support.

Most media education resource materials have had a very small audience and a very short shelf life because of the dynamic nature of the mass media and the high cost of many of these materials. In addition, there is the difficulty of distributing curriculum materials widely to teachers in the decentralized U.S. education system (Kubey, 1998). While some evaluation research has been conducted on the value of specific materials designed for classroom use (Brown, 1991; Singer & Singer, 1983), such research has generally not been extended to look at teacher practices or student performance outside of an experimental context, i.e., in real-world schools where media literacy is an on-going part of the instructional program. It has been difficult to evaluate the usefulness of instructional materials because of often undocumented variation in the ways in which teachers generally adapt materials to suit the needs of their students, their own interests and the context in which they work (Hawthorne, 1992).

Emphasis on staff development as a means to introduce media literacy into the K-12 environment began to develop in the early 1990s, after the influential Media Literacy Leadership Conference, sponsored by the Aspen Institute. In 1993 and 1994, the Harvard Institute on Media Education was implemented at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. It was a week-long program of instruction featuring a number of scholars and educators with interests in media studies, cultural studies and education reform which attracted educators from across the nation. It was the first of a number of staff development programs that began to emerge in the United States in the 1990s, and programs for teachers have run at Columbia University, New York University, the University of Dayton, Clark University, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and many other sites.

Recognizing that an investment in teacher education and training is an important component of building media literacy instruction in K - 12 education, media literacy teacher education has emphasized the following components:

- broad, rich intellectual training in media studies and education, not simply "show-and-tell" about specific resource materials;
- demonstration of classroom activities with meta-analytic review of interactional strategies and learning processes;

- exploration of the theoretical and practical issues around engaging students in media analysis and media production activities in the K - 12 classroom; and
- time to plan activities and collaborate with colleagues in designing a program of classroom activities that can be sustained over time and that map onto the context of existing instructional practices and curriculum.

Built in to a focus on staff development is the premise that teachers have a diverse range of motivations for including media literacy in the curriculum, that there are levels of understanding that teachers pass through as they explore and master the skills of critical analysis of media, and that their unique strategies and approaches to the subject need to be respected and valued (Hobbs, 1997).

Research Strategy

The research reported here attempts to provide documentation of the implementation of media literacy education in one school community by focusing on both a description of teachers' instructional practices and the presentation of quantitative data which illuminate some of the outcomes of student learning. Like much educational research, this study aims to generate the formation of research hypotheses arrived at by studying a specific case in detail (Stake, 1978). This research uses a mix of case study and empirical data collection to begin to account for the diversity of teacher practices as well as to document the specific kinds of skills which may be activated by experience in media analysis and media production activities.

Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods is not uncommon in educational research: it is a strategy to gain insight on both the processes used by teachers in implementing an instructional innovation and to understand the outcome of those processes on students' knowledge and skills (Merriam, 1988). By using a case study which documents the instructional practices developed by teachers in one grade level in one school district, it is possible to monitor the teachers' implementation of media literacy in the classroom. By "describing the context and population of the study, discovering the extent to which the treatment or program has been implemented..., case studies are particularly useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy" (Merriam, 1988, p. 31).

This study also makes use of quantitative data which documents the performance of students on items designed to measure specific knowledge about the mass media and skills in analyzing media messages. Quantitative measurement of media literacy skills is emerging in the research literature (Austin and Johnson,

1997). This strategy enables the full study of the learning process by focusing on the knowledge- and skill-based outcomes of the instructional processes used in the classroom. Too often, research in education may focus exclusively on the processes of learning and teaching and make little attempt to explore the results or outcomes of those processes. With research on media literacy beginning to emerge in the scholarly literature, research on both teacher behavior and student performance is needed (Desmond, 1997).

Since the research presented in this report is designed to document the impact of one staff development program on the classroom practices of a team of teachers at the secondary level and the patterns of skills and abilities of their students, this research is specifically interested in generating hypotheses about how particular instructional practices and curricula used by teachers may help develop or strengthen specific components of students' media literacy skills.

The following questions guide our inquiry: What kinds of classroom practices build what sorts of media literacy skills? What styles of instruction best support students' ability to engage in critical analysis of media texts? Understanding how specific instructional practices may lead to specific kinds of media literacy skills generates knowledge that will make it possible to design programs of teacher education and staff development that are maximally effective in helping teachers acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to the development of students' critical analysis and media production skills.

The Instructional Community and the Staff Development Process

The site for the research was a small school district in Massachusetts, 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. The community has been pursuing staff development opportunities for educators in media literacy for about three years and as of 1997 had a cadre of approximately 100 teachers who have had some exposure to instruction in media literacy.

Most school reform initiatives develop through the initiative taken by a single individual or small team of faculty and administrators who develop programs and activities over a number of years (Hobbs, 1998). The program in this school district began in 1994, when Mr. MacP., the director of the school's health education program, sent four educators to media literacy summer programs at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and to Ryerson Institute in Toronto, Ontario to learn more about how to integrate media education across the curriculum. Mr. MacP. recognized that media was a critically important "environmental factor" in shaping young people's ideas about wellness and lifestyle choices, including their decisions about sexuality, nutrition, physical

fitness, alcohol, tobacco and drug use. When the team of educators returned form their summer staff development experiences, they decided to create a Task Force on Media Literacy. They met during the school year to plan how to encourage the community's interest in media literacy. With the assistance of the local cable access center, teachers and students began receiving video production training.

During the summer of 1995, the first author was invited to conduct a week-long graduate level course in media literacy to 30 teachers in the school district. The course overviewed the central issues in media education using the theoretical model developed by the British Film Institute. The basic framework of this model consists of critical questions focused around six key themes: audience, agency, technologies, languages, representation, and genres. The staff development course included activities designed to strengthen teachers' media analysis skills, plus intensive discussion of controversial issues relevant to media and youth, including the impact of violence, the representation of gender, race and class, and the social context of media consumption in the context of a consumer culture. Substantial use was made of "found" texts in newspapers, radio, television, and magazines, which were used for analysis. The course also briefly introduced teachers to the range of materials, curricula and videotapes available to integrate media literacy into language arts, social studies and health education. Appendix A provides a review of the aims and content of this course.

But rather than focusing on training teachers to use a specific set of materials, resources or tools, the goals of this course aimed to inspire teachers to make the connections themselves between their existing curricular goals, their existing classroom practices, and the activities of media analysis and media production for students. As part of their coursework, teachers were required to develop a unit of instruction, with lesson plans and resource materials, suitable for an instructional period of at least one week in length, which applied the key concepts of media literacy to their existing subject areas.

Teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with the learning experience, and during the 1995-96 school year, many teachers implemented the curricula they had developed during the summer as the group of teachers continued to meet for both formal and informal instruction during staff development opportunities. These opportunities became available during the school year as a result of the school district receiving a small federal grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) in Washington, DC. The grant was awarded to encourage teachers from all subject areas to explore how issues of adolescent health (alcohol, tobacco and drug use, sexuality and body image, nutrition, violence) could be explored through a media literacy perspective. This research report documents a small component of the initiatives undertaken in the context of this grant, focusing on the efforts made at grade nine only. This study does not

report on the specific instructional interventions designed to teach health education outcomes.

It is important to stress that these teacher education opportunities were optional for the educators in the school district, not mandated or required. These were made available to educators and offered as optional enrichment activities for teachers with the time and interest to participate. Overall, teachers who participated in the staff development experience had a minimum of 35 hours of instruction to a maximum of 56 hours of instruction over the course of twelve months.

Only the activities of ninth grade teachers and the performance of ninth grade students in the school district are reported in this study. Teachers in the ninth grade had the opportunity to develop a coordinated, cross-disciplinary approach to ninth grade instruction. This "team-based" approach, which grouped the entire class of ninth graders into four teams of approximately 65 students, allowed four teachers to work in a coordinated way to provide instruction in the subject areas of language arts, social studies, math, science and the arts. In addition, block scheduling made extended 90 minute time periods a routine component of the ninth grade program. The circumstances of this school district were ideal for inviting teachers to create new approaches to integrate media literacy concepts into the curriculum, since high levels of teacher collaboration were encouraged and supported, and the normally oppressive problems of scheduling and time periods were reduced as a result of the decision to implement block scheduling (Hobbs, 1997).

Of the 16 teachers responsible for ninth grade students, six participated in the media literacy graduate course. Each of the four ninth-grade teacher teams had at least one faculty member participate in the media literacy staff development experience. These teams chose diverse strategies for implementing media literacy education, and these approaches are described below.

The Chameleon Team

Teachers in the 9th grade Chameleon team took a coordinated approach to the process of curriculum development. Two members of the team participated in the media literacy staff development program, and discussed the concepts with their colleagues. During the Summer, team members designed a number of activities that crossed all four subject areas. This was the only team that wrote a detailed curriculum plan which outlined the planned curriculum activities of the year across all four subject areas.

Some activities included a serious inquiry on news and newsmaking, including students' daily reading and analysis of the *Boston Globe*. Students analyzed

advertising, with explicit focus on target audiences, appeals, visual and auditory attentional devices and placement of ads in various sections of the newspapers and in different dayparts in the broadcast schedule. Students counted, charted and analyzed the patterns of advertising in newspapers and on television news. In math, the teacher included lessons dealing with logical reasoning, including syllogisms and hypothetical reasoning. They learned about cigarette advertising and promotional efforts as they affected the economics of different professional sports. In English, students practiced writing news articles, press releases and editorials on a variety of different political and social issues.

Another major activity involved the creation of a student media production. Students worked in teams to create messages using the formats of magazine, radio and television. They created various news, ads, and editorials. They had to choose a specific target audience and had to have include some content from each of the four content areas in math, language arts, science and history. Some students gathered magazine articles which surveyed how much water people use, creating charts and graphs of the patterns they discovered in their research. Some students included radio interviews with famous characters from ancient Roman history in a "time travel" radio drama. Students worked in teams, but the final project work was individually graded. They had a written paper which served as an opportunity to reflect on the learning experience as well as week-by-week logs of the strategies they used to complete their work. The entire project took 12 weeks from start to finish and students were given structured intervals to work on these projects within the context of the instructional day.

Ms. L., the history teacher for the Chameleon team explained, "We did this because we wanted them to realize how much work and how much thought goes into the construction of a piece." According to Ms. L., "Media literacy is learning to ask questions, to put ideas together and to discover meanings in messages by thinking for yourself."

In the Chameleon's science class, Mr. D. and his students investigated the representation of scientific information in the mass media, looking at differences and similarities in the ways that newspapers, magazines and television news depict the scientific method, new evidence on various medical developments, and controversies in science. In one activity, Mr. D. included a close analysis of two different documentaries about the Alaskan oil spill in his unit on the environment. He conducted a series of activities where students formally analyzed the representation of a *National Geographic* video about the Exxon Valdez oil disaster and compared it to the videotape about the event produced by Exxon. According to Mr. D., "Students will be learning about science for the rest of their lives via the mass media. It's very important for them to recognize the kinds of messages about science that get a lot of visibility in the media and appreciate the wide range

of information that doesn't get media attention, because these patterns influence the kinds of policy decisions people make about supporting scientific research as well as decision-making about environmental regulations."

In addition, during the fall of 1995, the Chameleon students had an enrichment experience that contributed to the media literacy skills of students. About half of the students in the Chameleon team had the opportunity to participate in a two day-long program of lessons from the KNOW TV curriculum, offered by the author as part of the creation of a one-minute videotape about the program, which was scheduled to air as part of the cable industry's annual televised award program, the Cable Ace Awards. On the first day, students engaged in the workshop, which consists of activities, viewing and discussion and lessons to help students ask critical questions about non-fiction television programming. Some of these questions included: How does the producer's motive shape the program content? What techniques are used to enhance the authenticity and authority of the message? What techniques are used to attract audience attention? How are image, sound and language used to convey meaning? How might different viewers interpret this message? Who makes money from this message?

On the second day, students were videotaped by a professional camera crew, and the classroom activities which had been implemented on the first day were re-created for the camera crew. This experience created some excitement in the school, as students watched the producer, director, sound and lighting crew transform the classroom into a set, tape various lesson plans and activities from multiple angles, and gather footage needed to produce the segment. Both teachers and students at the school recognized the value of an informal learning experience-- participating in the construction of a videotape -- as a useful strategy in helping students appreciate how media messages are constructed.

The Chameleon team used the widest variety of instructional practices to develop media literacy skills, including media literacy across all subject areas, using primarily teacher-generated activities and materials. Teachers included a balance of media analysis and media production activities.

The Plaid Team

Only one teacher in the Plaid team participated in the summer staff development program, and he already made extensive use of film and video in the classroom. Mr. C. was unimpressed with the existing curriculum materials in media literacy that were briefly reviewed in the staff development course, and he chose not to use any of these materials in his teaching. A social studies teacher, Mr. C. has been using video and film actively for more than ten years, and has a well-developed philosophy about the use of video in history as well as a set of

teaching methods he has been developing over the years. This philosophy did not change as a result of his participation in the staff development program.

On a daily basis, he used short video clips from feature films, documentaries and other sources to illustrate various aspects of his world history course. For example, he used John Ford's film, *Grapes of Wrath* starring Henry Fonda when he taught about America during the 1930s; he used Cecil B. DeMille's *Ben Hur* and *El Cid* when he taught about Roman history. Mr. C.'s strategy was to show short (10 - 20 minute) clips from these films along with a worksheet that invited students to notice various aspects of geographic, social, cultural and political life that is represented in the films. He included questions like: What kind of architecture is evident? and What kind of relationships between men and women are evident? In addition, he used interpretive questions that invited students to reflect on the connections and paradoxes that emerge when comparing and contrasting the representations of history in the textbook to the message shown on the screen.

He also included a media production activity where students work in teams to create a short video piece about a specific geographic region by writing scripts and selecting and ordering six pictorial images, then transferring the narration and images to videotape. The first step in this activity was to write scripts about their chosen country based on information provided in the textbook and library research. Mr. C. rescued 50 old issues of *National Geographic* from the town's garbage dump, and in the second phase of the activity, gave each team of four to five students a few magazines, and invited them to select pictures about various aspects of the culture, including geography and environment, cultural practices, physical resources, and kinship patterns. Students cut out about 60 different images, but worked as a team to select only six to be used in their video. Mr. C. provided a flow chart for planning the process, and in six 90-minute classroom periods, he had six teams produce videotapes, which he then screened for students as a "review" for the end of year test.

Mr. C.'s rationale for his teaching method was pragmatic. "History is generally boring for students, more so than other subjects. I try to make it interesting by using a variety of approaches." He noted, "That's especially important in 90 minute classes, and it's more interesting for me, teaching four classes covering the same material each day. Video also gives me a break, because that 15 minute clip that I use makes my life easier, too."

Mrs. W., his colleague teaching English, included one major activity that promoted media analysis skills, a cross-media comparison involving Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird.* In the activity, students read the book, watched the film, and saw a live stage production of the play, discussing the issues involved in film and theatrical adaptation by looking at the characteristics of each form.

The Plaid team's exposure to media literacy came primarily through the use of film and video in the teaching of the specific subject areas of social studies and a cross-media comparison in language arts, with no use of off-the-shelf materials or specific instructional coverage of media issues, topics, or genres like news or advertising.

The Red Team

One teacher from the Red team participated in the staff development program. Mr. R. developed a six-week unit and included a series of lessons on the theme of "Heroes," a part of the 9th grade English curriculum as outlined in the school's textbook series. He included the examination of heroes in the mass media, including those from popular film and television programs, as well as those from athletics, music and contemporary politics. Mr. R. appreciated the off-the-shelf curriculum materials that were made available to teachers and used them in his work with students. One example of a classroom activity was an activity from the *Beyond Blame* curriculum on media violence (Center for Media Literacy, 1995) involving counting different types of violence in a action/adventure program. This activity included a writing activity about students' experience of the instructional process. According to Mr. R., "The students did some of their best writing since kids could go in any direction they wanted." He also used the *Adsmarts* curriculum (Center for Media Literacy, 1992) to help students analyze alcohol and tobacco advertising. In the process, students made their own print and video ads. In science class, teacher Ms. C. involved students in making short documentary videos about the environment, including explicit instruction on how point of view can be established through visual and verbal devices.

Mr. R.'s motives in including media literacy in the curriculum related to his concerns about the impact of media culture on his students. He noted his pleasures and frustrations in implementing these activities by stating, "It was fascinating to see how students' eyes were opened to the power and influence of media in their lives, but it was frustrating to see how many of them don't want to think while they watch TV." He described himself as doing "a little sermonizing" by informing students about the statistics about the ubiquity of media violence, real violence, and the at-risk position of youth in contemporary culture. He recognized the contradiction of using this teaching method, noting, "Students almost have to convince themselves instead of accepting a 50-year old's point of view."

The Red Team's exposure to media literacy came primarily through the use of two off-the-shelf programs for media literacy, both designed to explore two problematic aspects of media culture: violence and substance abuse. Students were

also exposed to media analysis activities in language arts and exposed to media production activities in science, but these activities were not actively coordinated.

The Gold Team

Teachers on the Gold team planned not to develop a media literacy program, and at the beginning of the school year in 1995, the researchers and the liaison with the school agreed that the Gold team was intended to serve as a control group for this research. While two of the teachers did participate in the staff development program, they informed Mr. MacP. that they did not intend to make any modifications to their curriculum during the 1995-96 school year, noting that they had already actively collaborated on a number of new curriculum activities during the previous year. However, by the Spring of 1996, a series of unexpected events converged to influence the Gold team teachers to include some media literacy activities in their curriculum.

The first event was the revelation that a school teacher in the district had participated in the making of some pornographic films. When this information was made public (by a parent in the school district who noticed the teacher's photograph on the cover of a videotape in the local rental outlet), the school was subjected to intense media scrutiny for at least a week. Satellite trucks surrounded the school, reporters waited outside the building to interview students and teachers, and the story was featured on local news, *Inside Edition*, the print tabloids, and on radio. Not only did the event raise intriguing questions about personal freedom and the role of a teacher in the community, the media coverage of the event inspired a number of teachers to reflect carefully on the process of newsmaking, sensationalism, the function of the press in a community, the power of images, and the media circus, which created opportunities for some students and parents to become temporary celebrities.

One Gold Team teacher who had participated in the media literacy staff development program used the opportunity as a "teachable moment" to explore issues of freedom, responsibility, media power, and other issues, as did a number of other staff at the high school and middle schools in the district. Many teachers, however, were angry or frustrated or incapable of dealing with the issue in their classrooms. A number of teachers preferred to ignore the video vans, reporters and microphones to concentrate on teaching about ancient Greece, Huck Finn or cell mitosis as opposed to the complex social, political and personal crisis occurring in the school community. However, this experience did serve as a catalyst for some teachers to become more active and committed in their stance towards the value of media literacy for students, and in particular, this situation

resulted in a leadership role for one member of the Gold team who had participated in the graduate staff development course in media literacy.

Another factor that caused the Gold team to choose to implement some media literacy activities during the spring semester was a staff development program on the *Adsmarts* curriculum (Center for Media Literacy, 1992). A member of the Gold team attended this staff development program and was inspired by the materials to begin using them immediately. This teacher recognized that many of her students were starting to smoke and use alcohol, and she initiated a series of activities with the Gold team faculty members which led to the implementation of some student activities late in the academic school year.

In particular, the study of advertising led to a production activity. The Gold team students were divided into four groups. For eight classes, students invented a product and designed a series of advertising messages using formats including magazine, radio and television advertising. Some other examples of Gold Team projects included designing promotional materials for a favorite book, analyzing tobacco and alcohol advertising, and creating written and visual works which demonstrated their awareness of the strategies used by advertisers to appeal to various demographic groups. Mr. P., a Gold team teacher, was surprised to discover how much interest students had in looking at old magazines when the class studied the history of advertising in the context of a social studies class. "The kids were overwhelmed with interest-- they were actively reading old magazines for a project involved with finding certain themes in advertising messages. I discovered that some students didn't understand the concept of 'theme,' but this activity made them work hard to try to get it."

The Gold Team did not plan to implement media literacy, but chose to do so near the end of the school year after faculty and students experienced a controversial community event which attracted media attention and affected the entire school community. The Gold Team included both media analysis and media production activities, and used off-the-shelf curriculum materials designed to help students critically analyze alcohol and tobacco advertising.

Research Design and Sample Selection

The research consisted of a post-test only, non-experimental design comparing the comprehension, media knowledge and media analysis skills among four group of students who participated in four different approaches to integrating media literacy into the curriculum, approaches individually designed by teachers who participated in a staff development program in media literacy and their teaching colleagues. Researchers were aware that three teacher teams would be implementing media literacy activities in their classrooms, and anticipated that the

Gold Team students would serve as control group for the research. However, as just described, at the end of the school year, it was discovered through teacher interviews that all four teams had implemented some media literacy activities in their classrooms. Because of the limitations of the research, the evidence from this study is best understood as a strategy for hypothesis formulation only.

Nearly the entire population of 15 year olds in this small school district were sampled. Approximately 20 students were absent from class on the days data were gathered, but the skills of more than 90% of the ninth grade population in the school district were still assessed. The original research design was to compare the performance of these students to a similar group of students whose teachers were not engaged in integrating media literacy into the curriculum. An attempt was made to secure permission from an appropriate control school in a nearby district but access was refused, a problem not uncommon in educational research (Office of Technology Assessment, 1992).

The school district's philosophy of heterogeneous grouping allowed the assumption to be made that students were more or less randomly assigned to membership in one of the four 9th grade teams. However, one teacher pointed out evidence that suggested this assumption may be flawed. In the school year that the research was conducted, two groups of students were not randomly assigned to membership in one of the teams: students who were enrolled in "Transitional Math," a pre-algebra course, and students who were participating in the school band. One teacher noted that, as a result of scheduling, the Plaid team membership included students enrolled in the band, but included no students enrolled in "Transitional Math." From his point of view, this decreased the normal diversity in his team. No other teachers identified differences between the membership composition of the distribution of students as an explanatory factor in affecting the performance of the four teams, however. Because of complications with scheduling, only 30 of the Plaid Team students were able to participate in the research, instead of the full complement of 60 students, reducing the Plaid Team sample size to only half the size of the three other teams. This difference must be considered in comparing the performance of the Plaid students to students in other teams for which there was access to the whole class.

Measurement of Students' Knowledge and Skills in Media Analysis

In order to assess student performance in media analysis activities, a measurement strategy was adopted which used in Western Australia to measure the performance of 15 year olds developed by Quin and McMahon (1994). The procedure consists of a posttest-only design. After providing students with access to a particular media text, a set of questions is administered via paper and pencil

measures, 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 used a text from a television news program targeted to teens (a Channel One broadcast about Hurricane Andrew, which was originally aired in 1992). This text was selected because students in the school district were unfamiliar with the format of Channel One, unfamiliar with a hurricane that had occurred more than four years earlier and in South Florida, yet generally interested in hurricanes. The segment itself uses a number of devices which make it visually different from local or network broadcast news. Channel One makes use of teenagers as sources of information, features teen anchors, uses informal settings and appearance, emphasizes popular music, rapid editing, and uses detailed, lengthy exposition about background facts and information often supported by elaborate graphics, maps or other visuals.

The instruments were administered to students over a two-day period. A team of students saw the six-minute video in a large room, and then were moved into two smaller rooms to complete the questionnaires. Approximately 30 minutes were required for students to complete the items.

Measurement of the Variables

Comprehension skills were measured by asking students to complete five multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions regarding the significant factual content of the newscast. These questions focused on students' ability to recall information that was verbally, graphically and visually presented in the segment. These included the ability to identify: the number of people forced to evacuate their homes after the hurricane, the number of people killed, the factors which contributed to the cost of the storm damage, the wind speed category designation system, and the part of the hurricane that is most damaging to the coastal areas.

Media literacy skills were measured by asking students to complete two multiple choice questions and five open-ended questions, designed to measure students' ability to identify the newscast's target audience, the identification of sources in the newscast, the differences and similarities between the newscast and local or network news, techniques in the newscast designed to attract audience attention, and the ability to identify facts which were omitted from the segment.

Media consumption habits and behaviors were measured by questions exploring students' viewing habits (using the "viewed yesterday" method), the number of

working TVs in the home, subscriptions to cable television, daily newspaper, and/or weekly newsmagazines; number of people in family. From the data collected via "viewed yesterday," the number of hours were coded, as well as for the target programs of news, talk shows or reality TV programs.

The open-ended questions were coded by two coders who had an inter-rater reliability of greater than 90%. ANOVAs and regression analyses were conducted using the BMDP statistical package.

Quantitative Research Results

The Chameleon students significantly outperformed all other groups in media literacy skills, receiving a mean score of 4.22 (with a range of 0 to 7) in the overall summary score of all items ($F = 5.46$, df 3, 193, $p < .001$). The Red team students consistently scored lowest in most measures of media literacy. For example, only 43% of the Red team members could identify the target audience for the newscast as aimed at teenagers, compared with 61% of the Chameleon team ($F = 3.34$, df, 3, 193, $p < .02$). Only 33% of Red team students were able to identify the author of the news segment as 'Channel One,' when presented with four options in a multiple choice format, compared with 72% of Chameleon team members ($F = 7.68$, df, 3, 193, $p < .001$). Chameleon team members were also much better able to identify sources used in the construction of the newscast ($F - 2.38$, df, 3, 193, $p < .07$) and much better in identifying techniques used to attract audience attention ($F = 3.49$, df, 3,193, $p < .01$). Table 1 displays these results.

On the comprehension measures, the Plaid team students outperformed other groups, with an overall mean score of 5.18, compared with the Red team (3.72), the Gold team (4.69) and the Chameleon team (4.22). These results were highly significant ($F = 6.52$, df, 3, 193, $p < .0003$). Table 2 displays these results.

When students' media use habits were examined, it was discovered that Plaid team students had significantly fewer television sets in the home as compared with other students ($F = 4.52$, df, 3, 180, $p < .004$) and the Plaid and Gold team members watched fewer talk shows ($F = 4.66$, df, 3, 193, $p < .003$). Table 3 displays these results. These differences may be a result of the differences in sample size between the Plaid group and the other teams. In addition these differences may be due to the non-random sampling procedures regarding the pre-algebra math students and those enrolled in the school band. Table 4 reveals that the number of televisions in the home is inversely correlated with performance on comprehension ($F = 4.90$, df, 2, 181, $p < .003$), but not media literacy skills. The fewer TVs in the home, the higher the students' comprehension of television

news programming. Media literacy skills also point in this direction, but the findings are not statistically significant.

Discussion and Interpretation

This case study suggests 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. Teachers need to be comfortable and confident in order to include new approaches, topics and activities into their classrooms. Staff development experiences that provide opportunities for thoughtful discussion about issues related to the intersection of media studies and education can encourage the development of professional relationships between teachers that facilitate active support and collaboration between colleagues.

A number of external factors shaped the decisions by individual teachers to begin the process of including media literacy as a component of instruction in the ninth grade, including data concerning the rise in teenage smoking and an incident where the school gained the momentary attention of the "media circus" for a newsworthy, sensational event. This case study demonstrates the variety and unpredictability of various "entry points" for teachers as they develop and refine their own reasons for deciding to include media literacy within the content of their existing curriculum.

While all teachers received the same staff development experience, they responded to the experience differently. Some were confident only in trying out the use of existing off-the-shelf curriculum, while others developed original lesson plans and activities independently. Some worked alone within their own classrooms, while others actively developed collaborative, cross-disciplinary projects involving other teachers. Some maintained their existing attitudes and beliefs about using media in the classroom, while others described a process of tremendous growth and change in their understanding of the role of media in the classroom. The case study evidence suggests one hypothesis for future research: *different experiences and evidence can motivate teachers to recognize the relevance of incorporating media literacy concepts and activities into their existing instructional program, and that these experiences may shape the curricular choices made by teachers.*

The results of the quantitative research on students' learning show 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 (including news, documentary, and advertising) 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.

This research also shows that students' ability to recall and remember information presented on television was highest for those participating in a program in which film and video texts were used with highest frequency, on a daily or near-daily basis, in an instructional context in which students were required to retrieve information from visual sources. Simply studying the genres of news or advertising, or exploring the issues of violence in the media or substance abuse, did not appear to develop effective comprehension skills.

Because of the limitations of the research design, the evidence from this study is best understood as a strategy for hypothesis formulation. The data suggest another hypothesis for future research: *students may achieve competent levels of media literacy skills without specific instruction in a specific media genre (e.g., news, advertising, documentary).* Plaid team students performed well in media literacy skills even though they did not receive explicit instruction about newsmaking. However, the performance of the Plaid team students may be due to the configuration of students who participated in the research, since only half of the students in the Plaid team were sampled. If it had been possible to collect data from the whole Plaid team, media literacy and media comprehension scores may have been found to be lower with a larger number of students included in the sample. Understanding more about the acquisition of media literacy skills in relation to the study of specific media genres is an important future research issue. If media literacy skills can be developed without specific focus on media genres of news, advertising and documentary, this would shift much of contemporary instructional philosophy in the field (Hobbs, 1994). Further research is needed to explore this possibility in more depth.

As noted throughout, this research represents preliminary evidence from a small team of teachers and a small sample of students in a single school district. This research was not able to include a control-group, pre-post, or other experimental design which would enable us to pinpoint exactly which combination of classroom practices affected student skills. As a result, the generalizability of this research is limited.

However, this research explores possible connections between teachers' strategies, choices and philosophy in approaching media literacy in the classroom and the specific patterns of ability in the performance on students on media analysis and media comprehension skills. The evidence suggests a third hypothesis

for future research: *frequent use of video and film based texts in the classroom can build students' ability to effectively use television news as a resource for gaining information.*

The evidence also suggests a final hypothesis for future research: *student media analysis skills are strongest when explicit instruction in specific media genres (news, advertising, documentary) is paired with the application of media literacy skills in a number of different subject areas cross the curriculum, using a balance of media analysis and media production activities.*

This research demonstrates the diverse range of approaches that different teachers used when attempting to design a series of classroom practices that drew upon connections between media analysis and media production activities and existing curriculum goals for language arts, science, social studies and math. Such documentation is increasingly valuable as the attempt is made to gain a clear picture of the increasing diversity of classroom practices now emerging among educators who implement media literacy instruction in the K - 12 community.

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Appendix A
Summary of Aims and Content in Teacher Staff Development Course
Introduction to Media Literacy

Overview

This course serves as an in-depth introduction to media literacy, the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms. Participants will gain increased awareness of media influence on the attitudes and behaviors of children and youth; strengthen their knowledge about the mass media in society, improve their critical reading and viewing skills; and learn about specific strategies for incorporating media literacy concepts and activities into existing curricula in grades K-12. Teachers receive 38 hours of instruction.

Instructional Objectives

- Learners will gain significant knowledge about the historical contexts in which media education emerged in the 20th century in Great Britain, Canada and the United States and appreciate how the various tensions between different ideological perspectives regarding media have shaped the study of media in classrooms from elementary school to graduate school.

- Learners will gain a basic understanding of the socio-political, cultural and economic forces that drive the newspaper and magazine business, broadcasting, cable television and advertising industries.

- Learners will gain knowledge about three major topics in the field of media studies: newsmaking and the role of news in a democratic society; media economics and the impact

of advertising on cultural values; and media representations and the complex functions of mass media storytelling in a culture.

- Learners will gain strategies for incorporating media analysis and video production activities into existing grades K - 12 curricula, including how to adapt various kinds of inquiry in age-appropriate ways.

- Learners will gain appreciation for how media literacy activities impact other issues in education, including the uses of time, teacher training and staff development, the role of the teacher in the classroom, integration of subject areas, distinctions about vocational and academic coursework, multicultural education, home-school connections, various theories of literacy, and the application of technology in education.

- Learners will gain strategies for evaluating effective uses of media and technology in the classroom, identify misuses of media in schools, and appreciate the ways in which media education re-shapes expectations of parents, teachers and students regarding schooling, media culture, the processes of individual and social change, and explore their own attitudes and behaviors in relation to the mass media.

Course Content and Issues

Basic Issues

- historical development of media literacy: McLuhan's legacy
- key concepts in media education: key questions in critical analysis
- TV culture versus print culture: connections and contradictions
- how media culture changes the nature of knowledge

News, Democracy, Citizenship

- critically analyzing news, documentary and non-fiction programs
- analyzing news media: ownership, objectivity, citizenship and democracy
- understanding news production processes, constraints and limitations
- analyzing newspapers in education -- historical and economic contexts
- understanding approaches to teaching media literacy in history and current events

Media Economics

- understanding media economics
- analyzing the historical development of advertising: selling audiences to advertisers
- analyzing the impact of advertising on program content
- understanding materialism, consumerism, and the commodification of culture
- teaching advertising in the context of language arts and graphic design

Representation

- storytelling as culture
- stories about violence and power in the mass media
- the debate about media violence and its impact on youth
- concerns about stereotyping and representations of race, gender, class
- media consumption in the identity formation process

- media representations and reality: what's real and what's reel?
- media representations and the social status quo: power dynamics

Media Education Pedagogy

- evaluating effective uses of media in the classroom
- media education and inquiry-centered education
- how critical analysis skills are connected to knowledge about the mass media
- video and multimedia production opportunities and challenges within the subject areas
- television, attention and cognitive skills
- processes for evaluating learning in media education
- designing effective learning experiences with media literacy integrated into the curriculum

TABLE 1
Student Performance on Media Literacy Items

Skills	Overall score	Identify target audience	Identify author	Identify sources
Plaid team (n=30)	3.84	75%	71%	1.65
Gold team (n=60)	3.35	49%	61%	1.14
Red team (n=60)	2.94	43%	33%	1.52
Chameleon team (n=60)	4.22	61%	72%	1.72
F(3,193) =	5.46	3.34	7.68	2.38
p<	0.001	0.02	0.001	0.07

Skills	Identify visual techniques	Identify differences	Identify similarities	Identify omitted facts
Plaid team (n=30)	1.71	1.25	1.28	40%
Gold team (n=60)	1.58	1.45	1.09	49%
Red team (n=60)	1.64	1.15	1.03	39%
Chameleon team (n=60)	2.18	1.66	1.39	55%
F(3,193) =	3.49	1.89	1.10	1.25
p<	0.01	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

TABLE 2
Student Performance on Comprehension Skills

Skills	Overall score	Identify evacuated residents	Identify residents killed	Identify factors cost
Plaid team (n=30)	5.18	59%	71%	84%
Gold team (n=60)	4.69	60%	70%	78%
Red team (n=60)	3.72	51%	60%	56%
Chameleon team (n=60)	4.22	32%	71%	68%
F(3,193) =	6.52	3.72	0.63	3.15
p<	0.001	0.01	n.s.	0.02

Skills	Identify wind speed	Identify category storm	Ability explain category	Ability explain damage
Plaid team (n=30)	100%	87%	81%	34%
Gold team (n=60)	85%	87%	70%	16%
Red team (n=60)	66%	58%	56%	21%
Chameleon team (n=60)	86%	83%	64%	15%
F(3,193) =	6.12	5.91	1.98	1.82
p<	0.001	0.001	n.s.	n.s.

TABLE 3
Student Media Consumption Patterns

	No. TVs in home	% watching TV news yesterday	% watching talk shows yesterday
Plaid team (n=30)	2.80	9%	0%
Gold team (n=51)	3.70	7%	0%
Red team (n=48)	3.60	5%	11%
Chameleon team (n=55)	2.96	13%	15%
F(3,193) =	4.52	0.75	4.66
p<	0.004	n.s.	0.003

TABLE 4
Comprehension and Media Literacy Scores by Media Use Patterns

Quantity of Media Products in the Home*

	Comprehension	Media literacy
LOW (0—1) (n=63)	4.58	3.59
MED (2) (n=71)	4.29	3.48
HIGH (3) (n=53)	4.18	3.80
F(2,184) =	0.92	0.50
p<	n.s.	n.s.

*Aggregated items include: home newspaper delivery, home newsmagazine subscription, cable TV.

Quantity of TV Viewed

	Comprehension	Media literacy
LOW (O—1 hrs/day)	4.35	3.54
MED (1.5—3 hrs/day)	4.27	3.72
HIGH (3 or more/day)	4.52	3.49
F(2,194) =	0.35	0.27
p<	n.s.	n.s.

Number of TVs in Home

	Comprehension	Media literacy
LOW (0—1)	5.12	3.91
MED (2—4)	4.48	3.68
HIGH (5+)	3.73	3.23
F(2,181) =	4.90	1.13
p<	0.009	n.s.