

assumptions being made about the outputs, and about what students know and are able to do, but little evidence to support these assumptions.

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6

Media Literacy in Massachusetts

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When the phrase 'Media Education' is used in the United States, most educators think of public television broadcasting, or else they think the reference is to video production classes at the secondary level, usually designed as nonacademic vocational-style coursework for students who are about to drop out of school, or at the very least, are "not college bound". Few spontaneously identify Media Education with the process of learning about media industries or actively analyzing media messages. When U. S. educators and advocates got together at a national leadership conference on media literacy sponsored by the Aspen Institute in 1992, much attention to definitional concerns was present. Because it did not restrict itself to audio-visual media, the phrase, 'Media Literacy' was recognized as superior to the concept of 'Critical Viewing Skills' that had been visible since the mid-1970s, when the first rush of interest in Media Literacy was fueled by increasing concerns about the impact of media violence on young people.

A working definition of Media Literacy was established by U. S. educators, as documented in Firestone (1992): "Media Literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms."

This definition represents an expanded conceptualization of literacy, so that reading, speaking, listening, writing, critical viewing, and media production are all included under this umbrella definition. Strategically, the definition was aimed to help educators recognize the connections between media access, analysis, and production skills, and the larger aims of kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) education, because the lack of connection between Media Literacy educators and the mainstream K-12 community continues to be an important obstacle to implementing Media Education in the curriculum.

The operating principles of Media Literacy seem consistent with perspectives on Media Education that are identified by other contributors to this volume. U. S. educators have adopted a set of concepts, borrowed from Canadian and British educators, which recognize that all media are constructed representations, that meaning is derived from the intersection of reader, text, and culture, and that messages have economic, political, social, and historical contexts. Media Literacy educators also generally recognize that good classroom practice includes a balance between media analysis and media production activities, that student-centered inquiry approaches to learning and teaching are most effective, and that a wide range of media forms and genres, not just audio-visual media, should be formally included as study objects.

THE CONTEXT

Educators are coming to recognize that, in a world saturated with media messages, it is important for students to be able to access, critically examine, and communicate using print, images, video, and other forms of expression. In addition, it is no longer adequate to pretend that the information received from television is peripheral to a student's life: mass-mediated messages are now central to our political system, our understanding of global issues, and the ways in which we perceive ourselves in relation to others. In part because of its ubiquity and pervasiveness, teaching about the media can be relevant to a number of curricular areas, including language arts, social studies, health, vocational education, journalism, science and technology, and the arts.

In the United States, Media Literacy initiatives have often been based on the efforts of a single teacher in a school or district, working alone. Teachers in the subject areas of language arts, video production, or social studies (most usually at the middle-school level and above) frequently become attracted to issues relevant to Media Literacy, for one or more of a wide spectrum of reasons ranging from the desire to protect children from media manipulation to an interest in promoting social change (Hobbs, 1994). Teachers who begin to experiment with Media Literacy in the K-12 classroom are often unaware that there exists a network of educational resources and educators who share their interests, or a theoretical literature that examines the pedagogy of Media Studies. Frequently, these individuals will have devoted significant self-study to the issue and developed their own approaches to teaching Media Literacy before they ever become aware of others engaged in similar work.¹ Occasionally, their backgrounds in Media Studies and Media pedagogy come from reading TV criticism and reports on the media business in the pages of the local newspaper, reporting on Hollywood and the media business

¹These informal claims are based on personal experience of introducing teachers to Media Literacy in communities across the United States.

as part of entertainment TV, and critics, scholars, and popular writers including Marie Winn, Neil Postman, Jerry Mander, David Bianculli, and Ken Auletta. Also, teachers with interests in Media Literacy come with a range of different types of academic training, from degree programs in education, the arts, literature, history and politics, and journalism and communication.²

It is important to recognize that the decentralized educational system of the United States promotes such diversity of approaches. With 15,000 different school districts and more than 2.5 million teachers, political and community leaders in the United States have an antipathy toward national models for education policy. Each of the 50 states sets its own curriculum frameworks, and each school district interprets those frameworks and develops a program of instruction, staff development, and student assessment. This approach to education ensures large differences in the funding of local education, and as a result, there is wide stratification in the quality of education between communities. Some U. S. schools have made huge investments in computer and video technologies, for example, whereas others have barely enough money for paper, pencils, and supplies. Reverence for community-centered education policies and hostility toward any attempt to develop coherent national programs is demonstrated by the near-constant efforts of political conservatives to recommend the abolition of the U.S. Department of Education.

The wide diversity of approaches used by teachers of Media Literacy in the United States has led to a number of schisms among media educators, most notably between those who view Media Literacy as a form of protection for children to help them resist the lures of commercial culture, and those who view Media Literacy as a discipline in its own right, often on the grounds that Media Literacy empowers young people to make their own interpretations and strengthen their communication skills (Fehlman, 1995).

At the elementary levels and in the field of health education, where critical analysis of alcohol and tobacco advertising is increasingly common in U. S. schools, the 'protectionist' stance is dominant. The 'empowerment' model is common in both poor urban and wealthy suburban and private schools, where politically active, younger, and intellectually engaged teachers are comfortable straying from the packaged materials provided by textbook publishers, which serve as the defacto curriculum for most schools.

Recently, Media Literacy programs have begun to take hold in some schools and school districts as a result of increased educational opportunities for teachers. Because staff development opportunities are usually controlled at the district level, Media Literacy advocates have attempted to reach educators not through teacher education, but through the creation of resource materials, videotapes, curriculum guides, and other material designed for in-classroom use (Brown, 1991). Media Literacy staff development programs have often been aimed at teachers within a

²Based on interviews with a sample of 12 teachers of the 90 who attended the Harvard Institute on Media Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 1-5, 1994.

metropolitan region or school district, initiated by a faculty member at a nearby university, using methods composed of lectures, discussions, viewing activities, model lessons accompanied by analysis and critique, production activities, and time and resources for strategic planning to help teachers develop new ideas to implement in the classroom.

Until the 1990s, few formal training programs were available to educators, particularly in the United States. In 1993, the Harvard Institute on Media Education was initiated at Harvard Graduate School of Education.³ It was the first of a number of staff development programs that began to emerge in the United States in the 1990s. In 1993 and 1994, the Harvard experience provided an opportunity for nearly 200 teachers and academics to identify the motives and priorities each brought to the enterprise of involving students in media analysis and production.

During the 1990s, as education reform efforts at the state level encouraged the development of new standards, curriculum frameworks, and innovative assessment models, a number of states explicitly called for the inclusion of skills of media analysis and production. The State of New Mexico, for example, mandated a course in communication for all high school students (McCannon, personal communication, 1995); the State of Massachusetts included media analysis and communication skills not as a separate subject, but within language arts, social studies, health, science, and the arts.⁴ More than 15 states have curriculum frameworks that support Media Literacy goals. In 1996, the State of North Carolina embarked on the development of an optional end-of-year assessment of Media Literacy skills for students in Grades 3 and 4, 7 and 8, and 11 and 12.⁵

Teachers who embrace Media Literacy often take on increasingly active roles in their school districts, even though most tend to focus their energies on their own classroom practice. In 1995, I distributed a questionnaire to the 200 educators who had completed the Harvard Institute on Media Education in 1993 and 1994, with questions designed to identify the behaviors they had engaged in since returning from the Institute, as well as items measuring their attitudes about the possibility of expanding Media Literacy programs to reach all students in their schools. Of the 40% of participants who returned the questionnaire, 87% of the full-time teachers

³The Harvard Institute on Media Education began as a week-long residential program of professional development for educators from across the United States. In 1994, a number of Media Literacy summer programs at other universities were implemented in addition to the Harvard program, including at New York University, Columbia Teachers' College, the University of Dayton, and Ryerson Institute in Toronto. Media Literacy teacher education programs sponsored by public television stations, art museums, cable television programmers, and newspaper publishers have also proliferated.

⁴Drafts dated March 1995 of the Massachusetts Language Arts Health, Social Studies, and Art Education curriculum were being widely circulated to educational leaders across the state, although at the time of writing, a final document has not been approved by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

⁵Personal communication from D. Vickers, June 15, 1996.

who participated in the Institute continued to work primarily as individuals in the classroom, with only about 13% engaging in collaborative activities with other teachers. However, more than 65% of teachers have shared the materials they received at the Institute, and more than 50% of the teachers have led in-service programs, mentored other teachers, or shared their resource materials, videotapes, and lesson plans. Only about 8% of respondents have developed models that promote the learning of media analysis and production skills across an entire school, aiming to bring these practices into widespread use by many teachers across multiple grades and subject areas (Hobbs, 1996).

The purpose of this chapter is to profile a small sample of the 26 teachers who participated in the Master's Degree program within the Billerica Initiative. By examining the process by which teachers create their own approaches to curriculum in Media Literacy, we aim to identify how teachers' attitudes toward education, youth, culture, and media shape their curriculum choices and interpersonal behavior in the classroom. By examining the ways they see themselves in relationship to their students and their peers, this chapter describes some factors that predict a teacher's willingness to take on the task of becoming knowledgeable about media and skilled in using Media Literacy pedagogy in the classroom. Using profiles of teachers working with students ages 12 to 17, the chapter explores the range of teacher attitudes, behaviors, and philosophies in order to better understand the characteristics of Media Literacy as it is practiced among some teachers in U.S. public schools today. The chapter concludes with some observations, hypotheses, and critical questions about the application of the district-based model of Media Literacy education that was employed in Billerica.

THE BILLERICA INITIATIVE

The Billerica Initiative is an ongoing effort by the Billerica, Massachusetts Public Schools to develop Media Education training in a comprehensive program aimed to integrate Media Literacy concepts into Grades K-12 in a working-class community northwest of Boston. Through staff development, community outreach, curriculum development, and performance assessment the Billerica Initiative attempted to introduce the skills of Media Literacy to 340 teachers and 7,000 students. The most important component of the initiative was a long-term staff development program consisting of a graduate-level program of courses that led to a Master's Degree in Media Literacy, sponsored by Fitchburg State College and the Merrimack Education Center, a cooperative staff development program which serves 22 school districts in the communities northwest of Boston, Massachusetts. The program resulted in the creation of a group of Media Literacy experts within the school district, a number of ongoing cross-curricular programs, and a substantial amount of media analysis and production activities which are integrated within the day-to-day lives of students and teachers.

Billerica was one of the first sites in the United States to receive *Channel One*, a commercially supported current events television program for teenagers, now in place in more than 12,000 schools, with a reach of more than 7 million students each day. Schools receive television equipment for use in classrooms in exchange for broadcasting the program, which contains 10 minutes of teen-oriented news programming and 2 minutes of advertising each day. At the introduction of *Channel One*, educators in Billerica were deluged with public criticism from academics and educational leaders, including the National Education Association who charged them with selling their students to advertisers and wasting valuable minutes of the school day. Nevertheless, school officials in Billerica believed that the program offered them the opportunity to improve their students' understanding of current events, enhance the use of media technology in the schools, and promote a sense of community through the broadcast of student-produced news and information programming.

Since 1989, when *Channel One* was first introduced in Billerica, educators within the district have become increasingly sensitive to the need to help strengthen students' ability to analyze and evaluate media messages. In addition, increased availability of hardware in the classrooms has made it easier for some teachers to increase their use of video materials as resources for teaching and created a climate of interest among teachers about strategies for using video production activities for educational purposes.

When Middle School teachers voted unanimously to receive *Channel One* in 1992, they did so primarily because they wanted the opportunity to have a television monitor in every classroom. But some teachers and parents were also strongly concerned about the perceived vulnerability of Middle School students to advertising and news content, with a number of teachers noting that younger students often lack the reasoning and critical thinking skills to analyze sophisticated, slickly produced advertisements, and lack the world knowledge to appreciate the current events information provided on *Channel One*, which is largely aimed at high school students.

In Billerica, Media Literacy was initially understood by school officials to serve as a form of 'protection' for students who were about to be exposed to *Channel One* each day. Only gradually did educators and leaders in the school administration recognize the possibility that Media Literacy could enrich the curriculum in Grades K-12 across a range of subject areas.

Before *Channel One* was turned on in the district's two Middle Schools, all teachers attended a 2-hour presentation introducing them to the concept of Media Literacy, where teachers practiced analyzing news and advertising and learned of some simple activities and discussions to engage students' critical viewing skills. A group of middle-school teachers also attended a 1-day seminar on Media Literacy, which was designed to introduce teachers to media analysis skills, and to discuss connections between Media Literacy and the middle-school curriculum. The pro-

gram was enthusiastically received. Teachers noted that the high level of engagement and enthusiasm among colleagues was in startling contrast to the usual ambivalence, skepticism, and mild hostility that was often a part of staff development efforts.

As a result of the success of this program, in the Spring of 1993, 30 teachers (representing each of the faculty teaching teams in the Middle Schools) enrolled in a 30-hour in-service course, *Introduction to Media Literacy*, with some teachers enrolling through Fitchburg State College to receive graduate credit. This course provided a broad overview of the issues involved in the analysis of print, imagery, and electronic media. Teachers regularly engaged in analysis of a variety of different media, including newspapers, magazines, TV entertainment and news programming, and episodes of *Channel One*. In addition, they wrote critical reviews of existing resource materials and curricula for Media Literacy, and designed their own lesson plans for integrating Media Literacy concepts in their classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data reported here were collected as part of the teachers' coursework, required for completion of the Master's Degree in Media Literacy. Teachers had the option of interviewing and observing a colleague as one of two possible course assignments. In one course, teachers studied the profiles and classroom descriptions developed in the original *Models of Media Education* project (Hart & Benson, 1993). To participate in this project, teachers had to volunteer to be observed and find a partner who could schedule time to watch one or two classroom lessons and conduct a detailed interview. Twelve teachers chose to engage in this project, and in this chapter we report only 4 of the teachers who work with students ages 11 to 16, excluding from the sample those teachers working at other grade levels, or those whose work is in subject areas other than language arts or social studies. These profiles make it possible for the reader to gain a set of mental pictures about the practice of Media Literacy education at a specific moment in time. Teachers' articulations of their rationales are distilled from a 40-minute interview based on the original U.K. *Models of Media Education* project (Hart & Benson, 1993). The accounts of practice were written as descriptive observations of one or two classroom periods by those teachers with primary responsibility for students in the middle-school grades (ages 11-14) and the first 2 years of high school (ages 14-16).

Teachers selected a colleague to observe, negotiated a specific date and time, arranged with the Superintendent and the Principal for coverage of the observers' classes for the observation time, and carried out their observation. Then, after school, within a week of the observation, the teacher-observer interviewed the colleague using the structured schedule of questions developed in the original project in England. The reports were written up, shared among the entire class of 26 teachers and served as data for classroom discussion.

Teachers discussed with the author the experience of having a colleague make an observation. In Billerica, classroom observations are exclusively reserved for purposes of evaluation, and educators in Billerica have relatively little exposure to educational research on site. Teachers noted that this tradition created an expectancy that caused some tension on both the part of the observer and the part of the teacher being observed. Although teachers agreed about the importance of capturing authentic classroom experience, the novelty of the experience created at least two distinct methodological effects which could be labeled the 'safe' lesson and the 'teacher focus'.

As noted in the Introduction to this book, teachers being observed sometimes chose to engage in practices they considered 'safe.' Although Billerica teachers frequently noted that were increasingly comfortable developing more spontaneous approaches to media study based on the 'teachable moment,' the act of a colleague observing and writing a report about one classroom period led to the tendency for teachers to choose a 'sure fire' activity that carried little risk of failure. As a result of the Master's Degree coursework, teachers had a lot of exposure to the use and analysis of 'found' media texts from current newspapers, television programs, popular music, and other sources. Many teachers gained increased comfort with using such spontaneously collected materials within their own classrooms. The techniques and pitfalls of the use of 'teachable moments' were a recurring theme in the staff development program. In some instances, this also created a more artificial learning experience for students, who in a few cases had been exposed to the same lesson earlier in the school year.

SELECTED CASE STUDIES

The four examples that follow illustrate something of the range of approaches found among the teachers in the study. They also illustrate the limitations of using teachers rather than researchers to interview their colleagues and observe their lessons.

Examining Families on Television: Jean

Jean is at Franklin Middle School, where she teaches both language arts and social studies, possessing an undergraduate degree in education and more than 20 years of experience in the classroom. Her motivation to teach Media Literacy comes primarily from her interest in helping students make connections between the humanities and social studies, her interests in the representation of gender, race, class, and ethnicity in the mass media, and her concern that students become engaged in the learning process and personally responsible for their own education. Jean commented on the tension at work in wanting to include more Media Literacy activities but feeling tied down by the demand to 'cover content' in terms of the specific content she is responsible for addressing in her social studies class. For

example, she tries to include Media Literacy concepts even when she is teaching about the Renaissance, as she invites students to examine critically images and points of view.

Her lesson on TV families was taught to seventh graders for two separate 40-minute periods. The general approach for the lesson involved brainstorming of key ideas about being a critical viewer, with some media research being done by the students during class time and at home, and some discussion about the perceived realism of different prime-time situation comedies. Jean identified three broad goals for the learning experience:

1. Students should gain the experience of watching television actively and to appreciate that the media's representation of families was constructed;
2. Students should gain skills of critical decision making based on evidence from a range of sources;
3. Students should gain an appreciation and respect for their own (and others') opinions and choices.

Before the first session, the students were given a sheet which outlined a 'pre-viewing assignment,' to be completed the night before the first class presentation. The assignment required students to make a list of films or TV shows that portrayed families. The students then had to evaluate each of these families on the basis of their being 'realistic' or 'unrealistic,' and they had to provide specific evidence to support their choices.

Jean began the session by asking students to define 'media' and the idea of being a 'critical viewer' in their own words. They brainstormed a list of different types of media and agreed that all media offer messages that may include both print and visual components. Students in this classroom quickly identified that 'critical' didn't necessarily have a negative connotation, but that being critical had more to do with understanding messages rather than assigning labels like 'good' and 'bad.' In a carefully guided discussion, Jean led the students through a process of generating a set of elements that 'critical viewers' use to make their judgments about various mass media. The list that was generated including the following concepts: realism, entertainment value, age appropriateness, credibility, and quality of construction.

To further the concept of being a critical viewer, Jean asked the students to make use of their pre-viewing assignment to examine those programs that were identified as 'realistic.' The development of this list was vigorous and was punctuated by the spontaneous singing and humming of theme songs associated with the TV shows the pupils were suggesting. The session ended with a list of programs that students identified as 'realistic' for the 1990s. These programs included *Family Matters*, *The Simpsons*, *Murphy Brown*, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Step by Step*, *Family Ties*, and *Full House*.

VIEWING ANALYSIS SHEET

Student Name:

Name of Program

List all Characters

Occupation

Approximate Age

Gender

Choose one character and write three adjectives to describe the person's personality.

Describe the major problem or conflict in the episode.

Describe any other problems or conflicts in the episode.

Describe the solution presented in the episode.

Who resolved the problem?

What action happens before each pod of commercials?

List all commercials and TV promotions shown during the episode.

FIG. 6.1. Viewing Analysis Sheet.

On the second day, the session began by looking in more depth at family shows. Jean led the students through a step-by-step process of analyzing the shows with a greater attention to specific details outlined on a 'Viewing Analysis' sheet (see Fig. 6.1).

After discussing some of these questions in terms of specific shows, students concluded that many of the family problems presented in the programs they had watched earlier in the week could not, in fact, be solved satisfactorily in the 30-minute airtime for the show.

One student was adamant about the fact that many of the problems and relationships depicted on these shows are realistic and that the situations could really happen. For example, after the teacher showed students a short clip from *The Simpsons*, one student recognized that Homer Simpson's beer drinking may reflect some fathers. In *Full House*, the students also felt that the ability of the characters

to help each other solve their problems with sensitivity and caring was also an accurate portrayal of many families. In the follow-up interview, Jean commented on the importance of being sensitive to the developmental levels of her students, noting that in her classroom, different students demonstrated different kinds of ability in making modality judgments. In this case, the teacher is echoing similar arguments by Dorr (1983) who pointed out age trends in children's strategies for making judgements about a television program's realism, showing that by about the sixth grade, children define "real" as "something that could possibly happen" (p. 92).

The classroom session concluded with the discussion of relationships between characters. Jean noted that the children were actively involved in debating the perceived realism of different programs, and they discovered that different students make different judgments about the same characters, depending on their own particular experiences and backgrounds. The lesson established the idea that perception of realism is an interpretive judgement, not an intrinsic characteristic of a message. It seemed to fulfill the general aims identified by Jean as the overall goals for the lesson, because the activity depended on students' active use of television viewing in the home, the discussion about realism introduced the idea that multiple criteria are used in making reality judgements, and the classroom discussion gave a number of students the opportunity to share ideas in a climate where different points of view were valued.

Analyzing Broadcast News: Gina

Gina is a journalism teacher at Lincoln Memorial High School, where she teaches journalism to mixed age groups of students aged 14 to 18. She is a journalism educator who has considerable experience in integrating both media analysis and media production within her courses. She is also comfortable adapting the activities to students with a wide range of abilities, because she has both younger and older students together in her classes. She identifies a range of goals in her own approach to integrating Media Literacy within journalism education. She identifies the following as goals for her students in reading or viewing news:

1. To realize that all messages are constructions that are created for a specific purpose and effect that is determined by the news organization.
2. To learn that messages represent the social realities of the times and places far removed from the students' own world;
3. To understand that a skillful viewer should examine many different stylistic features of a medium and should pay careful attention to the context in which the message occurs.
4. To recognize that each form of communication has unique characteristics, for example, television news differs in many ways from print news.
5. To learn to recognize the concept of 'audience' when using news media.

On the day of the observation, Gina handed out a survey form that was to be completed at home. The survey asked questions about the news consumption patterns of various family members. Gina later used the surveys as a framework for discussion and analysis about family patterns of news media usage. This survey included questions like: What news programs are watched at home? Who watches? How are programs selected? Is a newspaper part of home life? How frequently does the newspaper arrive? If so, who reads it? Do any family members read a news magazine? If so, why was that particular one selected? Which medium do you use to get information about current events?

After introducing the assignment, Gina and her students examined an episode of *CBS Evening News* that had been shown two days earlier. The class was divided up into groups of six or seven. Each student in the group had to watch the broadcast with a specific target task in mind. For those analyzing news, one student was in charge of looking at the relationship between the visual images and the verbal messages to see which stories had a close connection between image and sound, and which stories had images used to 'wallpaper' over a story where the images were essentially decorative. Another student's task was to identify the various points of view that were characterized in the segment elements; another examined the time elapsed for each story; another identified the placement within the program.

For those students who were analyzing the advertising within the news program, one student had the task of logging all ads. Another had to identify the target audience for each ad. Another team of students examined the techniques of persuasion used in each ad. Students watched the broadcast in its entirety, and reviewed specific segments in order to complete their tasks.

In the following class, small groups worked to determine patterns and relationships between the data collected. Students discussed the news organization's decisions about story importance; they identified various target audiences, including the elderly, affluent males, and busy professionals. They discussed what information was missing from the nightly news and made a list of where a viewer could go to get more information about various issues.

The observer for this classroom session noted how well this specific activity allowed for differences in cognitive and writing abilities, and generally made use of the diverse age grouping of the class. Some students were assigned the more concrete tasks, like counting and naming, while others were assigned tasks which involved more complex skills of analysis. Both teacher and observer recognized that this activity helped to create interest in news among students, and that it served to orient students to the idea of an 'author' in the news-making process, which is not always a transparent concept for adolescents.

It is worth noting that Gina makes use of 'key concepts' in identifying her general aims. Many other teachers found the articulation of overarching principles to be valuable in helping them recognize the different dimensions of learning about

media in the classroom. However, there is a danger that the 'key concepts' may be used as a kind of specialized language that serves teachers well for the writing of educational objectives but has very little practical purpose aside from satisfying supervisors, faculty, and school officials because they have not been made truly operational in the classroom.

Newspapers and Violence: Dave

Dave is a former middle-school English teacher who has developed expertise in computer literacy and is now is responsible for the computer classes that are a part of the middle-school curriculum. He has 20 years of experience as a teacher and is very comfortable with technology. Dave sees connections between Media Literacy education and technology education. His general goals for integrating Media Literacy concepts within his 'skills-oriented' computer literacy class are embodied in this statement:

If students can leave my program understanding that all media, including the software that they use, are constructions, that media production is motivated by special interest, and that media can affect them without their conscious knowledge, then I have successfully conveyed some important media concepts.

In one lesson, Dave introduced Media Literacy concepts by asking his students to demonstrate their ability to use word processing and publishing software in the preparation of a mock-up of the front page of a newspaper. The front page would contain the various elements common to most newspapers: banners, headline, multicolumn articles, graphics, and images.

In a previous class, Dave had asked students to create a news story suitable for the publication. Their story categories included human interest, sports, politics, accidents, baby stories, alien encounters, stories about violence, and advertisements. Students seemed surprised when Dave pointed out the similarities and differences between their topics and the contents of a newspaper. He commented outside of class on his dismay to find that students' general familiarity with newspapers was low and that their major contact with newspapers was mainly through the sports pages.

Students recognized their own application of the concepts of 'Who, what, where, when, why, and how,' and were then led into a discussion focused not simply on what was told, but also on what or whose story was not told. Dave noted, "I could tell by the responses of students and their level of animation that they were coming in contact with an area that they had never encountered."

On the following day, Dave explored the content of the articles students had written, many of which contained violence, either through exposition or through graphics. He asked the students whether the violence was characteristic or reflective of the culture they live in or whether their selection of violent material originated

in the desire to appeal to audience interest in order to sell newspapers. He used discussion with the whole class to help students recognize that their choice of content originated from a number of different news and 'reality TV' programs featuring police, victims, and criminals rather than from their own life experience or experience with print media.

Dave invited students to analyze why violence was so popular. Students created a list:

- It was easier to write about.
- The themes were familiar and predictable.
- Violence is part of life.
- Violence is contained in a large part of the information we receive from mass media.

Dave concluded the lesson by commenting on how, because of media messages, our society may be reaching a level of 'comfort violence,' which makes the presence of violence invisible, ordinary, and normal, and that to tolerate violence in this manner is to create a culture where everyone is at risk. Afterward, Dave recognized that he was "standing on his soap box in front of the kids" by concluding with a little speech about the evils of violence, but he feels passionately that his students need to know that he finds the culture of violence to be reprehensible. He is careful not to blame his students for their own interest in violence, but he is burdened with a concern that his students are "tuned in to the cultural priorities of the media, and turned off by the priorities and values of the school."

Dave's concern about the physical, social, and intellectual health of his students is evident in the energy he devotes to his work, and he attributes many of the cultural changes in the United States to the media's impact on cultural norms and values. Clearly, Dave recognizes that his 'protectionist' stance towards the issue of media violence represents contested terrain, but his work illustrates an important, widespread, and pervasive dimension of Media Literacy education in the United States.

Teaching About Film: Vic

Vic teaches English at Lincoln High School in Billerica, and has a life-long interest in film and mass media. He graduated from Emerson College, the first college in the United States devoted exclusively to the study of communication, and he has been teaching for almost 20 years. His aims in teaching Media Literacy include:

1. Helping students visualize both real and figurative images as derived from literary sources.
2. Showing students how one's personal experience is part of the process of connecting to a written 'story'.

3. Helping students apply key conventions of storytelling to the genres of literature and film.
4. Helping students analyze the construction of film images.
5. Strengthening students' interpretation and imagination in the reading process.

In this class of ninth graders, Vic has been reading *A Separate Peace* with the students. Working on Chapter 3, he began the class with a 'quickie quiz', a series of questions for students to answer in writing. These questions were concerned with the characters in the novel, and the questions encouraged students to reflect on the connections between the story and their personal experiences. After students finished writing, Vic invited students to respond to the questions orally. Few responded. He read a selected passage from the novel that illustrated a particular relationship between two characters and asked the class if anyone had experienced a similar situation. Again, few responded.

Vic then showed a segment of the film, *A Separate Peace*. He selected an image of a tree that was central to the narrative theme. The students readily offered their analysis of how the director used camera angles and other techniques to convey the story's meaning. The 'tree' image was shot to create the feeling of a loss of balance through camera movement. Discussion of this scene and the development of the characters at this point in the film suggested that students were connecting the story to their own experience.

When Vic asked students to compare and contrast the literary work to the film, students were clearly more uncomfortable with the visual scene of the boys diving beyond the river bank, into the water, as compared with their emotional disengagement from the same scene in the novel. According to the teacher-observer, the "literary version of the story elicited less spontaneous and emotional responses than the film." Students seemed unwilling or unable to reflect on the figurative elements of the novel and the film. One key scene from the film seemed less accessible to students, and Vic noted that this scene is dependent on language, not images.

Vic commented on his own observations about students' skills in analyzing literary works and film works. His concern after this class was that students' increasing reliance on content that is 'real' and 'visual' may work to the detriment of their ability to deal with content that is figurative, not literal, and imaginative. This comment underlines Vic's aim of helping students to develop an appreciation of figurative language, and stems from his anxiety that these skills are compromised in some way by the dominance of audio-visual media.

COMMENTARY AND ANALYSIS

Although many variables are involved in a teacher's adoption of teaching strategies and processes, the teachers in Billerica shared similar resources, including limitations in time, space, and materials. Since all have been working in the same district

for more than 10 years, their day-to-day experiences as well as their staff development experience is shared. While working within a common cultural environment of the school district, their curriculum frameworks are distinctly different, due to the differences in student age, intellectual ability, and subject areas. Their teaching methods vary widely, and most critically, their motivations, aims, and goals for their students differ in important ways. Some teachers understand Media Literacy to be powerful because of its ability to elucidate the ways in which media institutions have the power to shape young people's understanding of the world and themselves as actors in it. Some teachers understand Media Literacy as a useful expansion of the powers of analysis and inquiry that are central to understanding how knowledge is created and used in society. These underlying motivations shape the choices teachers make about what to teach and how to teach it.

Several teachers in the study observed that projects that involved collaboration did receive more attention and support from school administrators than projects developed by teachers individually. However, it also appeared that as the team of Media Literacy teachers grew stronger within the school community, a number of factors served to diminish or reduce their influence. For example, during the 3 years in which 26 teachers received intensive Media Literacy training, none of the administrative staff including principals, department heads and school curriculum specialists received any training whatsoever. Only one department head was a regular observer in the course of 3 years of weekly meetings. As a result, teachers often found little support and occasionally great hostility to their efforts. Many teachers complained that although they had the 'official' support of the superintendent, their direct supervisors would dismiss or trivialize Media Literacy, withhold the small resources they would request, or otherwise put roadblocks in their efforts to develop new activities and programs for students.

Another phenomenon identified through interviews with teachers in the Billerica Initiative is that teachers who chose to continue their professional development in Media Literacy perceived the processes or skills involved in media analysis and production as directly relevant to the subjects and skills that they already teach. The cases presented in this chapter show how teachers with various content responsibilities manage to integrate Media Literacy concepts and activities into their teaching, and how such practices fuel their confidence in the value of these choices. For a conversation about media violence in the context of a word processing and desktop publishing skills development course for middle-school students to happen, a teacher needs to have a high level of comfort with trying new ideas, a sense of his or her own perspective, values, and ideology, and an appreciation for how students will manage these ideas when they get exposed to them. Without the confidence that such activities have substantial merit and value to students, it is unlikely that teachers could sustain these practices as a regular part of classroom work.

Several teachers voiced concerns about the difficulty of building connections between Media Literacy and various subject areas. They asked themselves whether

Media Literacy, as a set of concepts and practices, should be integrated into every class where literacy skills are called on, or should Media Literacy have the legitimacy to stand by itself, as a set of knowledge and skills that deserves attention independent of its connection to literature, history, technology education or the arts. The tension around this issue reflects Michael Apple's (1990) observations about the relationship between ideology and curriculum, because Billerica teachers noted that, as a domain, 'mass media' is considered far too trivial, secondary and minor in relation to traditional subject areas. Hence integrating Media Literacy within the curriculum is a survival strategy, because "schools preserve and distribute what is perceived to be 'legitimate knowledge.' Schools confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups" (Apple, 1990, pp. 63-64). It seems unlikely that schools as cultural institutions will be willing to recognize the legitimacy of knowing about and analyzing mass media as long as high-ranking education officials persist on blaming 'evil media' for lower reading scores, or demonizing media and promoting the image of the helpless innocent, manipulated by capitalistic media barons.

Billerica educators received an enormous amount of negative pressure when they chose to accept Whittle's *Channel One* as a classroom resource, even when in doing so, educators recognized its potential as a tool to create opportunities to strengthen students' skills of critical analysis. The established paradigm among educational elites, that television is inadequate, dangerous, and inferior, means that Media Literacy educators cannot, at present, make claims that appear to shift or challenge the current distribution of 'legitimate knowledge.'

Most of the teachers who make use of Media Literacy concepts in their curriculum describe their own high levels of concern about their students' relationships with media culture. Teachers who do not perceive Media Literacy's connection to their curriculum, who believed that media study was displacing the study of more important subjects, or who are not personally worried about children and the influence of media were more likely to use media as a tool for accessing information, or documenting student performance on traditional tasks, and unlikely to continue professional development in Media Literacy.

CONCLUSION

Teachers' choices about what to do in the classroom are motivated by their own underlying philosophies about the subject area, the processes of learning, and their assessment of their own and their students' skills and talents. For many teachers, the dominant application of Media Literacy is in textual analysis, not creative production. The instructional technique of 'textual reading' is a familiar and comfortable process for most teachers. Few teachers in the United States have the access to production technology or the flexibility in their curriculum to involve students in media production, and many are sensitive to the historical contexts in

which media production has occurred in schools. They implicitly recognize that they work in a culture where media production activities have been "variously exploited to motivate alienated under-achievers, to extend self-expression and to develop individual creativity as ends in themselves" (Grahame, 1991, p. 148). Even when teachers have the skills to implement a media production activity, large class sizes and the 45-minute period limits teachers' ability to provide students with effective and meaningful hands-on experience in creating, designing, and producing media projects.

Media Literacy will probably continue to grow as a result of the individual efforts of teachers as they discover the resource materials, professional groups and networks of educators with shared interests, and emerging scholarly literature. Work within individual classrooms will always be at the heart of Media Literacy pedagogy. But if Media Literacy is to emerge as a new vision of literacy for the Information Age, then a high degree of coordination will be required from among a wide range of shareholders: the scholarly community, educators in K-12 environments, school administrators and educational leaders, parents, the technology, publishing, and media production industries, and the standardized testing industry. Given the decentralized and politicized nature of U.S. schools, it is unlikely that such coordination will receive the national or even meaningful state-level support it needs, and more likely that Media Literacy initiatives will develop as a result of innovation and experimentation in the diverse 'laboratories' of individual districts, schools, and classrooms.

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7

Media Education in Ontario: Generational Differences in Approach

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'Media Literacy' has been a required part of the secondary curriculum in Ontario for a decade. Previously, individual teachers, on their own initiative, developed units on newspapers, films, and less frequently, video production within their English practice, whereas arts teachers might include units on "electronic imaging" and photography (Ministry of Education, 1986). However, in 1987 the *English Curriculum Guideline* for Intermediate and Senior levels (ages 12-16+) stipulated media study was to become an official "category of study for one third of scheduled classroom time in one mandatory English credit at each of the Intermediate and Senior Divisions levels" (Ministry of Education, 1987). More recently, a government document entitled *Broad-based Technological Education* (Ministry of Education and Training, 1995) empowered schools to offer courses in "communications technologies" of which "print" is just one. This led to ground-breaking projects in a few schools between the Technology department and English teachers. Nevertheless, for the past 10 years and into the foreseeable future English departments are likely to remain the principal site of Media work.

RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCESS

The Ontario research into teachers' conceptions of media teaching took two complementary forms: interviews with 40 High School teachers as well as a subsequent province-wide survey. The interviews were conducted one-to-one in settings chosen by the teachers and at their convenience. Averaging more than 2