Reading the Media: Media Literacy in High School English

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My Goals

Tell the story of why and how high school English teachers reshaped the curriculum to prepare their students to critically analyze all aspects of contemporary media culture.

Describe the development of the innovative curriculum that incorporates popular media, television, journalism, film, and new media into the required English curriculum.

Provide empirical evidence of the impact of media literacy on the academic achievement of adolescents.
QUALITATIVE: 21 hours of transcribed interviews with teachers and students; student writing samples, curriculum materials

QUANTITATIVE: quasi-experimental pre-post design with matched control group with measures of reading, listening, viewing and media analysis skills
Expansion of the high school for arrival of Grade 9 students creates an opportunity to revise curriculum in Grades 9-12

- **Grade 9** focus on World Literature
- **Grade 10** focus on American Literature
- **Grade 11** focus on Media/Communications
- **Grade 12** focus on elective choices, including creative writing, public speaking, film, poetry, TV production, Shakespeare
**Why They Did It**

**RESPONSIVENESS:** “Mass media, popular culture and technology are significant forms of expression and communication in contemporary society.”

**RELEVANCE:** “We are aiming to help students become critical thinkers in responding to the world they live in.”

**RESPECT:** “It’s important to set higher goals to maximize learning for all students.”
Mind Over Media

Video created by the National Education Association (NEA) and aired on Court TV
Unique Features of CHS English Dept

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING: Diversity of students’ lived experiences makes class discussions worthwhile learning experiences.

BLOCK SCHEDULING: Structure enables varied teaching strategies emphasizing multimodal reading/writing

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM: Curriculum provides shared aims, goals, And themes while enabling teachers to deploy their unique talents, passions and interests
Themes

- Advertising, persuasion and propaganda
- Point of view in storytelling, literature, nonfiction and film
- Humans’ complex relationship with technology
- The role of journalism in society
- The process of literary adaptation
- How entertainment media reflects and shapes cultural values
- The representation of gender, race and ethnicity in media messages
- The personal and social impact of media violence
A Focus on Critical Questions

Key Questions of Media Literacy
1. Who is the author and what is the purpose of the message?
2. What techniques are used to attract your attention?
3. How are values, perspectives, and lifestyles presented in the message?
4. How are different people represented in the message?

Media Education Lab
Temple University
http://mediasmartphilly.com
**BOOKS:**
Orwell, 1984
Shelley, Frankenstein
Stark, Glued to the Set
Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest
Junger, The Perfect Storm
Hamill, News is a Verb
Anderson, Feed
Faulkner, As I Lay Dying

**FILMS:**
Tough Guise, All the President’s Men
High Fidelity, Bamboozled
Multimodal Texts

**MAGAZINES:** Adbusters, Brill’s Content
The New Yorker, Time, US News & World Report

**NEWSPAPERS:** Concord Monitor, Boston Globe, New York Times

**TV:** Burden of Proof, 60 Minutes
20/20
Instructional Methods

• Activation of prior knowledge
• Close reading & textual analysis
• Discussion connects text to text, text to self & text to world
• Informal pre-writing
• Small-group activities
• Research and information gathering
• Writing for specific purposes to varied audiences
• Variety of writing styles and genres
• Focus correcting (grammar, spelling)
Measuring Program Impact

1. Advertising Analysis
2. Critical Viewing Skills
3. Civic Engagement
4. Reading Comprehension & Analysis
Increased Understanding of the Complex Purposes of Advertising

- $$$ = purpose is a business reason
- Per = purpose is a persuasive reason
- Psych = purpose strategically links product to emotion
Recognition of an Unstated Subtext Message in Advertising

1 = “be cool”
2 = “change your lifestyle by consumption”
3 = “be responsible”
Critical Viewing of Television News

POV = number of multiple points of view identified

tech = creative construction techniques identified

omit = omitted information supplied

comp = points of comparison/contrast
Increased Numbers of Students Choosing News & Current Events

Percent who watch or read news and current events every day

- Watch news
- Read news

PRETEST
POST TEST

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Main Idea = number of key points identified in summary
Info Detail = number of specific details recalled
Increased Non-Fiction Reading Analysis Skills

- **tech**: number of creative construction techniques identified
- **POV**: multiple points of view identified
- **omit**: omitted information supplied

**Legend:**
- **Control**
- **Concord**

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Writing Skills

Quality = holistic score (1 – 5) evaluating clarity, coherence, and sentence structure.
Measuring Program Impact

Advertising Analysis

- Increased understanding of the complex purposes of advertising
- Recognition of unstated subtext messages in advertising
Measuring Program Impact

Critical Viewing Skills

- Increased skills in analyzing purpose, point of view, subtext & construction techniques

Civic Engagement

- Increased reading and viewing of news and current events
Measuring Program Impact

Impact on Print Literacy Skills

- Ability to summarize non-fiction informational text and recall details
- Ability to analyze author’s purpose, point of view, subtext and creative construction techniques
- Writing skills improve
“Creators of books and movies have to make critical decisions about how to construct a story just like newspaper editors and TV news directors.”

“I found myself wondering about the intentions of things that in the past I would have ignored or absorbed at face value.”
“Though I considered myself a critical thinker prior to the course, I don’t think that label fit my reading style at the time… I had been trained to passively read a book with a ridiculously obvious theme, come up with the thesis statement, and crank out a paper. This course made that impossible.”
The Learning Environment at CHS

- Curriculum reform initiated by faculty
- Block scheduling, heterogeneous grouping & common planning time
- Vibrant school library media center
- Support from school administration
- High quality local newspaper
Challenges for the Future

RELEVANCE: Continuing to be responsive to students’ lived experience with media and popular culture

INTERNET ANALYSIS: Critical thinking about online media and technology

AUTHORSHIP: Providing multimodal production opportunities for all students

OUTREACH: Implications for education policy statewide
"A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection, not an invitation to hypnosis."

-Umberto Eco
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