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Section 2: Media Literacy for K-12

A Review of School-Based Initiatives in Media Literacy Education

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When teachers use videos, films, Web sites, popular music, newspapers, and magazines in the K-12 classroom or when they involve students in creating media productions using video cameras or computers, they may aim to motivate students' interest in the subject, build communication and critical-thinking skills, encourage political activism, or promote personal and social development. This article reviews teachers' motivations for implementing media literacy in K-12 education, focusing on current efforts in elementary education, secondary English language arts, and media production. An overview of statewide media literacy initiatives in Texas, Maryland, and New Mexico is provided, and the author examines some public anxieties concerning the uses of popular media in K-12 classrooms and makes recommendations for future research.

Keywords: *media literacy; media education; video; curriculum; instruction; media production*

This past summer, I found myself sharing a cab with a teacher from Wisconsin who, like me, was headed to the airport after attending the National Media Education Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, an event sponsored by the Alliance for a Media Literate America. What did she think of the conference? I asked. She explained that she had come because as a high school video production teacher, she was looking for ways to improve her curriculum to better reach the 90 plus students who were enrolled in her course each semester, which was offered as part of the school's vocational education program. "I got much more than I bargained for," she explained, noting that she did not realize the breadth and diversity of media literacy educators. "I never thought I'd meet so many health teachers, and I never knew that there were so many nonprofit youth groups doing media production in after-school programs." She explained that although she enjoyed the chance to attend workshops and seminars with other high school video production teachers to learn specific strategies to use in her classroom, she

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was really excited by the opportunity to learn new things about topics that had not been on her radar screen before. For instance, she discovered that religious educators from many denominations use media literacy techniques to create opportunities for meaningful discussions about relationships, faith, and values. She was surprised to discover that so many English teachers not only analyze films based on literature but also include the formal study of advertising, news, and media violence. Social studies teachers introduced her to the ways of building critical-thinking and citizenship skills using newspapers and television news; librarians demonstrated how to critically analyze Internet Web sites and see the “biases” of various search engines. Media activists talked about strategies for communicating with the Federal Communications Commission and the problem of ownership concentration in the media. Was there anything about the conference that she did not like? “It was a little overwhelming,” she admitted. “But I now see that I need to find partners in my school and community to build something beyond just my own classroom.”

* * * * *

Educators have diverse and conflicting perspectives about the mass media. Most have a love-hate relationship with the mass media that is complex and multidimensional, which shapes their instructional practices in the classroom. Because of this diversity, different approaches to media literacy are emerging simultaneously in the 15,000 school districts in the United States as educators begin introducing students to instructional practices of media analysis and media production. Media literacy education has risen in visibility in K-12 schools throughout the 1990s, and although still proportionately small, a growing number of school-based programs are in place at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Defined generally as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993, p. 7), media literacy emphasizes both analyzing media and creating media (Buckingham, 2003). Drawing on the rich tradition under way in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia for the past 15 years (see Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett, 1992, for review), there has been substantial progress in the United States as educators have developed key concepts and principles that unify the field (Center for Media Literacy, 2004a), have formed two national organizations, and have held conferences (Action Coalition for Media Education, 2004; Alliance for a Media Literate America, 2004).

Although it is difficult to generalize about the diverse practitioners of media literacy among K-12 teachers, two general patterns are evident. One pattern emerges from those teachers who seek to develop students’ creativity and authentic self-expression; the other is found among teachers who are exploring economic, political, cultural, and social media issues in contemporary society. Many teachers “discover” media literacy as an instructional tool simply from

trying to motivate students' attention and interest in learning, without any awareness that a body of 25 years of scholarship and theory exists on the subject. They start by using newspaper articles, film, or video clips to capture student attention and gradually begin to incorporate discussion, analysis, writing, or media production activities to promote critical inquiry (Flood, Lapp, & Bayles-Martin, 2000). When they meet others using similar approaches and learn about the "key concepts" of media literacy, they get their first exposure to the emerging literature and scholarship in the field. These teachers are motivated by the opportunity that media literacy offers them to help transform the culture of the classroom and the school into a place where students' voices are valued and respected, where classroom learning is linked to students' lived experience, and where students can develop the confidence to express themselves in a wide variety of forms using language, imagery, and multimedia technology.

Other teachers begin with a sense of frustration or anger about some negative or problematic aspect of contemporary media culture, usually media violence, advertising and materialism, race or gender stereotyping, or concentration of media ownership. These teachers learn all they can about the topic and bring this information to their students. When they gradually discover that standing on a soapbox, lecturing, encouraging students to share their anger, does little to promote students' critical thinking, they may look for instructional tools and lesson plans on these important topics that create learning environments where students can learn about the media and express *their* views and ideas about the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of media's role in society. As teachers move from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," they help students to (a) reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes about the mass media in society, (b) gather information on the topic from different points of view, (c) subject the evidence to critical inquiry, and (d) create messages for authentic audiences using a wide range of media production tools. Some (but not all) of these teachers are committed political activists, dedicating themselves to important work that helps to change the systems of media power that they find oppressive. But instead of adopting an essentially persuasive effort to convince students of a particular belief system about media, these teachers emphasize the values of critical inquiry and student autonomy. They aim to provide learning experiences where students strengthen critical-thinking skills to reach their own understandings about how to fully participate as citizens and consumers in a media-saturated society.

Largely through the efforts of teachers like these, media literacy education has entered the K-12 world through many portals, including English language arts, social studies, fine arts, library-skills and educational technology, vocational education, and health education. Some schools emphasize primarily the study of media issues or the critical analysis of media messages, whereas other schools primarily provide students with opportunities for media production.

Like the parable of the blind men and the elephant, it is clear that different educators perceive parts of the media literacy elephant without necessarily grasping the whole of it (Tyner, 1991). This diversity of practices has led to some “great debates,” questions that may divide media literacy practitioners into distinct groups or camps, reflecting both the intellectual backgrounds and experiences of various practitioners as well as philosophical and ideological differences (Hobbs, 1998a). In reviewing school-based initiatives in the United States, I will describe some approaches now under way in American schools, examine the public anxieties about media literacy that may shape the work of practitioners, and identify some challenges that will face K-12 educators in the future.

EARLY-CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In early-childhood education, media literacy may be directed at parents to emphasize the value of selecting programs, setting media use limits, and developing family communication strategies that promote media as a learning tool. Many proponents of media literacy in early-childhood education approach the issue from the social scientific media effects or public health perspective. For example, *Remote Control Childhood* (Levin, 1998), published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, provides numerous practical strategies for early-childhood educators to examine questions of media violence, imitation, and aggressive play with children aged 3 to 8. In the late 1990s, Our Lady of Malibu School in Malibu, California, developed a media literacy initiative with elementary students, exploring consumerism, representation, and violence prevention, and conducted an animation workshop for fifth- to eighth-grade students to support values-oriented education. Forest Knolls Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, embeds a communication arts focus into its program for students in Grades 4 and 5, in which students learn about journalism by comparing and contrasting the differences between newspaper and television news, analyzing patterns in news coverage, and interviewing and writing news articles and television reports. Other communities have begun to explore media issues in the context of family communication through collaborative partnerships with educators. For example, in a rural Massachusetts community west of Springfield, a team of social workers established a community-wide study group on issues related to the effects of media on children, which led them to develop a day-long forum on media literacy for parents, day care providers, social service workers, and early-childhood educators. Such efforts increase awareness concerning the appropriate uses of media and technology with young children; more important, these efforts serve to introduce the concept of critical thinking about the media to young children and their parents.

ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION

An increasing number of literacy scholars and practitioners recognize that films, Web sites, television programs, magazines, newspapers, and even popular music are “texts” that communicate and carry meaning to “readers.” In a sense, literacy educators are responding to the social and cultural changes brought about by the increased dominance of visual and electronic media in the culture. A recent publication of the International Reading Association included more than 60 research articles about the relationship between visual and communication media as tools in the development of literacy skills (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997). Literacy educators with interests in media literacy generally adopt perspectives of textual analysis and sociocultural critical theory from the disciplines of the humanities, semiotics, and cultural studies, and some make use of educational research and learning theory.

Teachers say that including a range of diverse narrative and expository texts from the realms of film, television, popular print media, radio, and the Internet helps create authentic learning environments that can connect the classroom to the living room (Foster, 1998; Krueger & Christel, 2001; Teasley & Wilder, 1997). Using critical questions to stimulate students’ active reading response is increasingly a common classroom practice, and this instructional strategy has been extended to include the texts of popular culture, including television, movies, and popular music (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Research on the effects of media analysis activities shows that in high school classrooms, such practices create an instructional context that measurably strengthens students’ reading comprehension strategies and writing skills (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). Such research is beginning to allay the fears of some instructional leaders that media literacy is not rigorous or academically challenging.

These fears have also been alleviated by the work of Robert Scholes from Brown University, whose work on the *Pacesetter English* program helped bring media literacy into the advanced placement curriculum in high school English. In this program, English educators are urged to incorporate a wide range of texts beyond the traditional literary canon, including film, television, advertising, the Internet, and popular media (College Board, 2000). In English education, teachers aim to help students understand the process by which authors convey meaning about experience. Scholes (1987) emphasized that the media do not offer transparent reflections of events or people but instead, interpretations presented with varying degrees of reliability and power. Scholes wrote,

The point is not to pretend to offer students some magic talisman that will enable them to tell truth from falsehood in the media, but rather help them understand “mediation” (the pouring of raw data through the sieve of any particular media) as a textual process that requires interpretation. (p. 140)

Other educational leaders interested in the intersection of literacy and technology have joined with scholars to emphasize that students need opportunities to use visual and electronic tools to create, not just analyze, media texts. The board of directors of the National Council of Teachers of English (2003), a membership organization of 60,000 teachers, approved a resolution stating that they will (a) encourage preservice, in-service, and staff development programs that will focus on new literacies, multimedia composition, and a broadened concept of literacy; (b) encourage research and develop models of district, school, and classroom policies that will promote multimedia composition; and (c) encourage the integration of multimedia composition into English language arts curriculum and teacher education and the refinement of related standards at local, state, and national levels. This resolution provides further evidence that among mainstream K-12 educators, the concept of literacy is being broadened to include multimedia forms of expression and communication.

STATEWIDE INITIATIVES BUILD MOMENTUM

In 1998, the state of Texas codified media literacy within the context of English language arts as *viewing and representing* skills. In addition to offering a high school elective course in media literacy, the Texas framework for English language arts and reading emphasizes media literacy in Grades 4 through 12 via the processes of understanding, analyzing, and creating media messages, including nonfiction, visual media, and electronic technology sources. The state education framework also mandates that students use a variety of media formats and technology tools—such as photography, video cameras, microphones, presentation and graphic design software—to create their own media messages. For example, in Grade 10, students are required to work with a small team to produce a 5- to 7-minute video documentary about a social issue in their community (Texas Education Agency, 1998). The high-stakes test that all Texas students must pass before graduation now includes a component in which students must analyze persuasive techniques in advertising. In large part because the state of Texas has validated media literacy, there has been a rapid increase in the number of resources and curriculum materials available to K-12 educators. For example, the Center for Media Literacy's (2004b) online catalog carries more than 300 videos, books, and other materials available for use by students, teachers, parents, and scholars, and nearly all major educational publishers include some materials on the subject. With more than 4 million K-12 students enrolled in Texas schools (more than any other state except California), the state's leadership has helped increase the public visibility of media literacy among educators nationwide.

In another statewide initiative, Maryland developed a public-private partnership between the Discovery Channel and the Maryland State Department of Education, which led to the creation of *Assignment: Media Literacy*, a compre-

hensive curriculum that connects media literacy to the state's education standards in English, social studies, and health. Initiated as part of the cable industry's response to the school massacre in Littleton, Colorado, more than 3,000 teachers in the state received a day-long staff development program along with print and video instructional materials, which were provided free of charge to schools. Curriculum topics include asking critical questions, exploration of the role of video games in social and family relationships, television ratings and reviews, journalism and television news making, stereotypes, media representations of the Civil War, media violence in sports, and celebrities and their effect on identity, among other topics (Hobbs, 1999). Evaluation data reveal high levels of teacher enthusiasm but not uniform implementation of the curriculum, and a survey of elementary students shows that students believed they were more critical viewers, more cautious about advertising, and more skeptical of Internet content. Students also were more skillful in recognizing a media message's purpose, the message genre, and point of view (Kubey & Serafin, 2001).

This kind of public-private collaboration has drawn the ire of media activists who have charged that such collaborations with "Big Media" are co-opting the media literacy movement. The Action Coalition for Media Education was founded by the New Mexico Media Literacy Project on the premise that media literacy educators must exclude media companies from providing financial support for the development of the field, and that media literacy education must be closely tied to media reform efforts (Action Coalition for Media Education, 2004). The New Mexico Media Literacy Project (2002) accepts the thesis that "our mainstream media, led by the major global media corporations, have joined the Dark Side" (p. 1; see also Pacatte, 2000). The New Mexico Media Literacy Project is an outreach program of Albuquerque Academy, a private K-12 school, and the tireless project director Bob McCannon makes more than 150 presentations to students and teachers annually, donating his fees to support the organization. Topics include analyzing sexual imagery in beer advertising, media marketing and the tobacco industry, strategies of persuasion and media manipulation, and the health risks of television viewing.

Although researchers have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy programs in schools, few studies have been published. One of the challenges faced by most evaluators is the question of conducting research that takes into account the real-life characteristics of the school environment, including implementation by ordinary teachers, not specially trained experts. Many factors encourage (or discourage) K-12 teachers from implementing curriculum materials in the way that they are intended to be used. Although funding agencies place a premium on scientifically evaluated curriculum, teachers rarely (if ever) implement instructional materials according to the teachers' manual. Not only does this limit the validity of research evidence but also, according to Hollis, Kileen, and Doyon (2003),

much of what might make a curriculum valuable to a teacher, such as the flexibility to teach it in whatever way they want, may be exactly the factor that hinders the ability of a curriculum to achieve its greatest effect. (p. 1)

Further research should examine how teachers actually use media literacy materials (including videos and lesson plans) in the classroom, examining what changes may occur after teachers have participated in an after-school workshop, training program, or summer institute.

MEDIA PRODUCTION AND MEDIA ARTS

Another permutation of media literacy in K-12 education emphasizes students as media makers, composing for school newspapers and video yearbooks; creating public service announcements, narrative films, and music videos; writing film scripts, song lyrics, and magazine articles; and designing Web sites and video games. There are more than 10,000 high school journalism teachers and more than 1,500 media/communications specialists in K-12 schools in the United States (Market Data Retrieval, 2003). Since the 1980s, media production facilities have been present in nearly half of American high schools, with elective courses offered to students, often as part of vocational education (Cuban, 2002). In these courses, students learn how to operate media production equipment including cameras, switching and sound equipment, and editing and image manipulation software.

However, it is important to note that media literacy educators have long held some anxiety about the value of media production as an end in itself. Masterman (1985) noted, "Practical activity does not, in itself, constitute media education," warning about the technician trap, the tendency to see media education as a series of purely technical operations, which can lead to student media production functioning as "busywork, and in its more advanced manifestations, a form of cultural reproduction in which dominant practices become naturalized" (pp. 26-27). Media production activities must support the development of critical-thinking skills about the media. But as a result of the lowering cost and increasing availability of electronic technologies, combined with student interest in media production, there has been a steady growth in such instructional practices at the secondary level (Hall, 2003). In particular, many video production programs are taught by former media professionals who may (or may not) emphasize the development of critical thinking about the media, adolescent personal development, or political activism (Goldfarb, 2002).

Although media production teachers once had a schoolwide monopoly with their elective production classes, today some students have access to video camcorders, digital cameras, and editing and image manipulation software at home. Secondary teachers from the subject areas of the humanities, foreign language, and sciences are also more likely to give students the opportunity to create

messages in nonprint forms (Brooks, 2003; Bruce, 2002; Gardner, 2003). With the rapidly decreasing costs of video camcorders and editing software, the skills of composition using edited visual images, language, and sound will eventually become routine experiences for adolescents. But because schools change so slowly, and because the emphasis on K-12 educational technology has placed the Internet and computers (and not digital cameras or video production) at the center of the curriculum, it is probably likely that many young people will first encounter media production experiences as a homework activity or in an out-of-school context. After-school programs in media production are now common in hundreds of American cities, as exemplified by the M.A.R.S. program in Philadelphia, an after-school program for low-income African American teen males in which students write scripts, design storyboards, and create videos. The Listen Up network (2004) provides a valuable distribution function for similar youth media programs, allowing people to view online streaming video clips of youth-produced work. And new forms of media production are emerging, as Jenkins (2004) described participants in a GlobalKidz workshop in New York, for example, who worked with video game professionals to construct a game about racial profiling at airports. Students encountered important ethical issues in the process. How were they going to represent racial differences? Were they going to perpetuate or challenge stereotypes? These experiences contribute enormously to building critical-thinking and communication skills that according to Jenkins, lead youth to view commercial media content with a more self-conscious perspective.

DISTRICT LEVEL INITIATIVES

Magnet schools were originally designed as a strategy by large urban school districts to promote desegregation of neighborhood schools (Waldrup, 2000). Magnet schools enable students to choose to attend any school that offers the curriculum focus of their choice. During the past 10 years, many school districts have used "communication arts" as a theme for building their secondary programs, offering students a rich array of elective courses in graphic design, video production, journalism, photography, film study, drama, and theater. Media literacy practices have transformed many of these schools so that they focus less on the acquisition of technology skills and more on critical thinking and the complex processes involved in the communication of meaning through symbolic forms (Cohen, 1994). For example, the Norrback Avenue School in Worcester, Massachusetts, offers K-6 students an integrated program of communication arts including public speaking, media literacy, media production, dramatics, and telecommunication. At the high school level, the Communication Arts High School in San Antonio, Texas, emphasizes a humanities-focused, multimedia literacy approach, and unlike some magnet schools, it does not limit

recruitment to students who are interested only in communications careers. This program does not emphasize narrow career specialization in journalism or radio-television broadcasting. The San Antonio Communication Arts High School is based on the premise that the 21st century will demand strong communication skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking.

At Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, educators have offered, since 1988, the Communication Arts Program, a highly selective program for students who wish to integrate the study of media and communication across the curriculum. This program provides numerous opportunities for students to develop media literacy skills through activities that link coursework in social studies, language arts, and media production. Students engage in formal debates, analyze press coverage of political campaigns, produce documentaries, write scripts, analyze films, perform in plays, design Web sites, conduct interviews, and complete community service projects. In their senior year, students demonstrate their communication competencies in a formal, public interview where they present a portfolio of work they have completed to document their progress. The program has been so successful that in the 2004-2005 school year, the district is offering a Media Literacy Academy, which will be open to all students in the district and will include two required interdisciplinary courses in media literacy along with a wide range of electives in communication arts.

PUBLIC ANXIETIES ABOUT MEDIA LITERACY IN EDUCATION

Although the use of popular-culture materials, including advertising, television programs, movies, and popular music, are becoming more and more common in American schools, there is little widespread public enthusiasm for the use of popular mass media texts among most education and business leaders, and even less among parents and community leaders. Political leaders may occasionally acknowledge the value of media literacy (Lieberman, 1996), but so far, few have been willing to stand up and praise the benefits of teaching kids to critically analyze political campaign advertisements. The appropriate use of popular-culture texts in the classroom generates significant discussion among educators, parents, and community leaders alike. Is it really a good thing to have kids critically analyze an episode of *Dateline NBC* in their 10th-grade English class? Should they not be reading Shakespeare? Is media literacy improving public education or dumbing it down?

The best way to characterize the differing dimensions of this debate is to describe an experience I had in North Carolina a few years ago when offering a staff development program for English teachers. I was demonstrating how television news, advertising, and television dramas could be used to teach textual analysis skills and support literacy development. When it came time for questions, a teacher said,

Look, I've got 180 days and I see these kids for 45 minutes a day. I think I'd rather teach them these critical analysis skills by showing them fine works of classic film like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Citizen Kane* and maybe we could read *The New York Times* and I could teach these same questioning skills with *good* media—media that will enrich and stimulate them.

Immediately following this comment, another teacher in the other corner of the room jumped up to the microphone and said,

Wait a minute. These kids for the rest of their lives are going to be watching TV—dramas, sitcoms, news, and advertising. I'm not sure that they're going to learn how to critically analyze commercials by watching *Dr. Caligari* and analyzing *Citizen Kane*.

What this teacher was referring to was the concept of teaching for transfer, the goal of helping meanings, expectations, generalizations, concepts, or insights developed in one learning situation to be employed in others. Perkins and Salomon (1988) described many strategies for increasing transfer that involve making the learning experience similar to the situations to which one wants transfer to occur. Media literacy educators will commonly make the argument that if students are to be able to critically analyze media messages in the world outside the classroom, it is important to bring into the classroom examples of contemporary media culture that are part of their lived experience.

But as a former public official (an elected member of my community's school board), I am well aware of just how politically complex this question may become. Imagine a health teacher who is critically analyzing an episode of *Joe Millionaire* to explore the issue of gender stereotyping. A parent who will not let her children watch that particular program is likely to call the principal when she learns about it. Another parent will call if he believes that the teacher is selling a political agenda, not instructing about health. Another parent will claim that the teacher is simply wasting valuable classroom time with trivia. What is a school administrator to do? Similarly, teachers may wonder,

If I want to teach about media violence, or racism, sexism, or stereotyping, or homophobia as depicted in the media, should I expose students to videotaped examples of these types of messages, knowing that different people interpret messages in different ways and knowing that I cannot control students' interpretation of messages?

The appropriate use of popular-culture texts in the classroom generates more great debates among media literacy educators and introduces some rich and complex questions for future research.

Another common critique of use of media, technology, and popular culture concerns the belief that the superficiality and commercial value of popular-culture texts limit their usefulness. Applebee (1996) wrote that popular-culture texts, when used in the secondary English classroom, are often "too transparent

or too thin to support much discussion or debate. . . . When they are brought into the classroom . . . there may be little to sustain conversation” (p. 55). I have observed classrooms where teachers are just beginning to learn to use media, technology, and popular-culture texts to help students strengthen literacy skills. Sometimes the level of discussion did not raise beyond superficial information sharing about the latest details of a particular celebrity’s latest boyfriend troubles, concrete descriptions of plots and characters, half-hearted debates about the influence of media on behavior, or the relative merits or lack of quality in particular texts. Such discussions may sometimes confirm teachers’ fears that they are indeed wasting valuable classroom time with lunchroom-type conversation that does little to promote critical thinking. Based on my experience as a teacher-educator, I have observed that it takes about 3 years of practice, supported by staff development and peer critique, to enable teachers to develop the new skills and knowledge they need to effectively use media texts in the classroom to promote critical-thinking and analysis skills (Hobbs, 1998b).

Some educational leaders worry about the potential of media literacy to be used as a tool for propagandizing by the teacher, as slickly produced media literacy videos warn students that advertising is destroying the environment, that video games are causing young boys to be violent, or that women’s magazines are dehumanizing to adolescent girls. Callahan (2001) has documented that some teachers are aware when media literacy materials that they want to use in the classroom will be perceived as controversial by parents or school district officials. A number of school districts have adopted policies to minimize the possibility of parental disapproval and to encourage teachers to reflect carefully on their specific educational goals when using films and videos in the classroom (Zirkel, 1999). Because of perceived misuse of entertainment media in the classroom, many school districts across the nation have instituted policies that limit teachers’ use of popular films, television programs, and music. Some districts have a “controversial learning resources” policy that defines such materials as those “not included in the approved learning resources of the district and which are subject to disagreement as to appropriateness because they relate to controversial issues or present material in a manner or context which is itself controversial” (Zirkel, 1999, p. 70). These policies exist because in many school districts, teachers have used video and other media in ways that are not truly educational. Educators wishing to bring media literacy skills to their students will undoubtedly wrestle with preexisting contexts in some schools where video is used as a classroom babysitter by burned-out, incompetent teachers.

The ongoing and seemingly eternal tensions between “basic skills” and “informal learning” combine with the tendency of educators to downplay or ignore the role of home-based communication technologies such as television, radio, and video games in the lives of their students. These factors may make it difficult for media literacy to ever gain real visibility among K-12 education leaders (Kubey, 1998). The longstanding and traditional antipathy between classic/elite culture and popular/mass culture has been part of the education

landscape for more than 100 years (Dewey, 1916/1997). Teachers' "irrational loyalty to reading and writing" (Flood et al., 1997, p. xvi) may create resistance to the use of contemporary media and technology texts, stemming from their fears that children's media and technology use displaces their use of print, a fear that is not well supported in a comprehensive review of 30 years of social scientific research evidence (Neuman, 1991).

In responding to some of these public anxieties about media literacy, educators have begun to build a knowledge base for the next generation by documenting their own instructional practices (Duncan, 1997; Worsnop, 1994). Scholars have examined the broad institutional factors that may lead teachers to actively use or ignore media and popular culture as a teaching resource (Cuban, 1986; Hobbs, 1994; Oppenheimer, 2003; Tyner, 1998). In the past 5 years, case-study research and first-person narratives have emerged from classroom teachers and after-school educators who document both the satisfactions and challenges associated with the use of popular music, advertising, film, television, video games, and popular fiction in the classroom (Beumer-Johnson, 2000; Callahan, 2001; Feree, 2001; Hurrell, 2001; Kist, 2000; Michie, 1999; Sommer, 2001; Stevens, 2001). These teachers and scholars bring a perspective that emphasizes media and popular culture as texts that can promote student learning; through thoughtful reflection about "what works and why" in the classroom, this young generation of practitioners is leading media literacy education to the next stage of development.

UNIFYING EDUCATIONAL GOALS TO ACHIEVE LITERACY FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

Despite all the diverse approaches to media literacy in American schools, there have been several efforts to promote the kind of dialogue and debate to help bring about national-level consensus to identify priorities for the future concerning the relationship between technology, literacy, and education. Media literacy is beginning to be recognized as one dimension of the essential competencies required for life in an information age. Educators are beginning to distinguish between learning skills, such as those process-oriented cognitive, communication, and problem-solving skills (displayed in Table 1 below) and learning tools, which include information and communication technologies such as computers, networking, audio, video, and other media tools. Educational technologists seem finally to have recognized that any vision of 21st-century learning must de-emphasize the "tool focus" that has been prevalent in much scholarship about technology in education throughout the 1990s, and emphasize instead the development of students' critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

Will media literacy educators be willing to enter into dialogue with their colleagues in the fields of educational technology and library/information skills

TABLE 1: 21st-Century Learning Skills

<i>Information and Communication Skills</i>	<p>Information and media literacy Accessing, analyzing, managing, integrating, evaluating, and creating information in a variety of forms and media; understanding the role of media in society.</p> <p>Communication Understanding, managing, and creating effective oral, written, and multimedia communication in a variety of forms and contexts.</p>
<i>Thinking and Problem Solving Skills</i>	<p>Critical thinking and systems thinking Exercising sound reasoning in understanding and making complex choices; understanding the interconnections among systems.</p> <p>Problem identification, formulation, and solution Ability to frame, analyze, and solve problems.</p> <p>Creativity and intellectual curiosity Developing, implementing, and communicating new ideas to others; staying open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives.</p>
<i>Interpersonal and Self-Directional Skills</i>	<p>Interpersonal and collaborative Demonstrating teamwork and leadership; adapting to varied roles and responsibilities; working productively with others; exercising empathy; respecting diverse perspectives.</p> <p>Self-direction Monitoring one's own understanding and learning needs; locating appropriate resources, transferring learning from one domain to another.</p> <p>Accountability and adaptability Exercising personal responsibility and flexibility in personal, workplace, and community contexts; setting and meeting high standards and goals for oneself and others; tolerating ambiguity.</p> <p>Social responsibility Acting responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind; demonstrating ethical behavior in personal, workplace, and community contexts.</p>

SOURCE: Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003).

about the process of integrating media literacy within a broader context of 21st-century learning skills? Or will the discourse of opposition to media power, so compelling and attractive to radical educators and activists, encourage a stance that keeps them apart from their colleagues in allied fields? For media education activists who see media literacy education as a vehicle to change the media system itself, there may be little incentive to form such partnerships, particularly with technology educators who have for 25 years gladly collaborated with the business community. But for those media educators who see media literacy as a vehicle to change the education system and to affect the lives of children and youth, such partnerships may be welcome. Because of the ongoing controversy,

such debates are likely to continue to generate the lion's share of media attention to the topic of media literacy (WNYC, 2001).

There is no shortage of flowery language or theories about the promise and potential of media literacy and popular culture in education, as academic authors from many different disciplines conclude their critiques of media, technology, and popular culture by calling, often urgently and eloquently, for media literacy (Gitlin, 2001; Kellner, 1995). But although it is easy to recommend media literacy as an antidote, as Bazalgette, Bevort, and Savino (1992) pointed out, "The realities of teaching and learning [media literacy] are harder to define and share" (p. 3). In reviewing accounts of practice of media education in more than a dozen countries, they emphasized that what is institutionally appropriate in one setting may not be so in another. However, those who include popular culture in the classroom must be responsive to what Masterman (1985) has identified as the central objective: to "develop in pupils enough self-confidence and critical maturity to be able to apply critical judgments to media texts *which they will encounter in the future*" (p. 24). Teachers must design learning experiences that help students, as quickly as possible, to stand on their own two feet—able to critically analyze and create messages in a culture that is densely saturated with an ever-changing array of media messages and technology tools.

Media literacy in the United States is emerging not only from statewide or school district initiatives but also from the bottom-up energy of individual teachers who value the way that using media, technology, and popular culture improves the quality of student motivation, self-expression, or communication, or who are passionate about helping young people understand, challenge, and transform media's power in maintaining status quo power relationships through social and political activism. Educators' struggles to bring media literacy into the context of the K-12 environment remind us that this work is not for the faint of heart. Media literacy education depends on the courage and perseverance of individual teachers who are inspired and motivated by a wide range of different understandings about the role of the mass media and popular culture in society.

Sadly, many teachers are still teaching more or less the same way as they did when they started in their profession more than 25 years ago. With the average American teacher now aged 46 and likely to stay in education until retirement (Keller & Manzo, 2003), there are still many thousands of schools in the United States where most students get little meaningful time during the course of 12 years to engage in critical thinking about media messages or to create messages using technology tools. In many schools, the only meaningful relationship between literacy and technology is the use of word processing software. Most teachers simply have not had the time (or the perceived need) to become fluent in using media tools or the training to understand how to use media texts or media issues to promote critical thinking. By and large, schools of education have yet to discover media literacy. Because even young teachers are often not experienced with how to analyze visual or electronic messages, and do not themselves know how to create messages using media and technology, strengthening young

people's media literacy skills in the 21st century will continue to be an enormous challenge.

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