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Media literacy in public schools

Robert Timothy Chapman

MEDIA LITERACY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

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In Partial Fulfillment

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates media literacy curricula in upper-income and lower-income public schools. Twelve principals participated in a telephone survey by answering fifteen questions about their schools and districts. The survey was designed to capture curricula and demographic data of the participating schools. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the survey questions about the demographic data of the respondents' schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In this advanced information society, understanding various types of media information is a critical skill that the traditional curriculum in the public schools tends to ignore. However, teaching information technology involves rote learning unless it is approached from a critical perspective. Media literacy "focuses on the development of information and communication skills with today's media technologies, which enhance employment opportunities" (David Considine, 2002,p.11). It is necessary, because it teaches students how to think about text, and non-text, across many subjects, and how media information is systematically constructed. Media literacy promises the student the capability to translate, question, assess, and create information in various forms. The benefit of such a program would be a student population that is more literate regarding technology and media issues (David Considine, 2002).

Media literacy is often taught in conjunction with the social sciences, theater arts and language arts classes in

public schools. It is easier for individual instructors to integrate media literacy into other subjects, than it is to have it added to curricula. Some upper-incomes schools are teaching media literacy as part of their curricula. It seems that upper-income school districts have the funding, to add a media literacy program to their curricula, and the instructors tend to have more freedom in developing the curriculum than lower-income schools. But, there generally has to be a proven academic and social need, or an outside funding source, to get the administration to approve a media literacy curriculum.

The objective of this study is to investigate what category and income levels of public schools have a media literacy curriculum. This study also investigates which schools let their instructors create class curriculum. Finally, this paper investigates which schools have private funding, allowing them to add media literacy to the curricula.

Resistance to Media Literacy

Educators have been traditionally denied the power to shape much of the curricula in the United States, with local and state bureaucrats designing most of them. One of

the results is that the public schools rely heavily on rote learning, rather than teaching students to think on their own. Most schools still teach a traditional curriculum that includes remembering information without much critical focus on text and ideas. Along with rote learning, "Textbooks also offer teachers the security of knowing they are covering the waterfront, so their students won't be disadvantaged on statewide or national standardized tests" (Loewen, 1995, p.288).

According to Donna E. Alvermann, Jennifer S. Moon and Margaret C. Hagood, (1999) one problem of the commercial media is that some instructors see the media as a bad influence on students and only teach the negative aspect of media consumption. "When educators choose to ignore the [positive] impact that popular culture forms have on students, they refuse to face the reality that all of us live in a postmodern society infiltrated with media and technology..." (p.24). Taught in this way, media literacy becomes an unpopular course, and many students refuse to learn from this approach, even when it is an official part of the curriculum.

Mahiri (2001) said the reason his school and other schools have not incorporated media literacy into the

curriculum is that some teachers are still teaching a traditional curriculum. "Techniques and tools for teaching have not changed much in schooling despite the swirl of other societal changes" (p.382). Even with information technology available in many school libraries, some instructors and staff are unfamiliar with combining this new technology with media literacy. Information technology can aid instructors in teaching media literacy, because they can show the concepts and processes behind the creation of media information.

Many instructors are put into an awkward position when they argue for media literacy curricula, because many school officials are unfamiliar with this subject. Helen Nixon and Barbara Comber (2001) argue, that many schools are now just realizing how to use media literacy in the classroom. The application of popular, modern, yet examinable and difficult texts, implies stimulating potential for teaching media literacy in the public schools.

There is an important political reason for not teaching media literacy in public schools. Some schools are censoring media literacy, because they are confused and think it causes student violence. Considine (1994) said

that schools could counter censorship by developing the student's critical thinking and attention skills, that "offers children greater protection and independence than do well-meaning attempts to control the content of music, movies, or television, which inevitably clash with First Amendment rights" (p.25). But, it is still a frequently used argument by many school officials and politicians that popular culture, video games, movies, television, and the Internet cause some children to be violent, and therefore this type of learning should be censored, and not taught in public schools.

Despite these misgivings of researchers, many public schools are trying to work media literacy into course work or the curricula. Some schools are in a transition period, switching from using forms of rote learning to use information technology in conjunction with media literacy.

Hypotheses

This paper addresses the frequency and quality of media literacy in the California public school system. With that in mind, the following hypotheses are advanced:

Hypothesis 1

Upper-income schools are more likely to have a media literacy program in their curricula.

Hypothesis 2

Upper-income schools let their instructors create the course curriculum because they are teaching students to think on their own.

Hypothesis 3

Upper-income schools have private funding that enables them to add media literacy to the curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The problem persists today that persisted at the start of the twentieth-century: many schools teach a corporate style of learning; in particular, many low-income schools currently use this method of instruction. Postman and Wiengartner (1969) said this factory learning revolved around rote memorization, basic skills, and discipline, designed to prepare the student for the work force. This is an ordered and rote curriculum "and one has to visit the Ford Motor plant in Detroit in order to understand fully the assumptions on which it is based" (Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner, 1969, p. 30). A transition from this style of teaching to a more critical approach has real possibilities.

Teaching Media Literacy

Dede Sinclair (1996) argues that even children in kindergarten can learn media literacy since preschool children are recognized spectators and consumers of many media products. Therefore, educators can start teaching

media literacy to children to help them discern fact from fiction in the commercial media.

Medical Doctors, Michael Rich and Miriam Bar-on (2001) say that children as young as eight years old or younger, whose conceptual thinking ability has not formed, should begin learning media literacy skills. Second graders cannot distinguish between illusion and real life. They are exceptionally susceptible to the power of images and messages disseminated throughout the commercial media.

Chad Ruble (1996) observed that at Sierra Vista Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, fourth-graders conducted a taste test to separate fact from fiction. Two hundred students were asked to choose their favorite cola from three unknown ones. Most students were sure that they could identify their favorite drink during the taste test. The author found that 70 percent were unable to do so. The purpose of this test was to show the fourth-graders at Sierra Vista Elementary school how commercials influence their opinion of commercial beverages. Some of the schools in New Mexico are teaching media literacy to their students by reading television spots.

Ruble (1996) reports that seventh graders at Santa Fe Indian School studied television commercials to understand how advertisements are put together. From their examination of the commercials they produced their own Native American advertisement and message to show Native American values. These students were able to create and counter dominant media values by producing an advertisement, which represented their culture.

Another example of teaching media literacy is as implemented at Whitman Middle School in Seattle. In 1998, the school started a prototype curriculum called Media Literacy. The idea behind this program is to have students construct Public Service Announcements (Kay McFadden, 1998).

Seattle's public school system has implemented a prototype curriculum called *Creating Critical Viewers*. The course teaches children to be skeptical, instead of passive viewers. Students learn to judge the characters and the substance of the advertisements, and evaluate them in opposition to reality. The program has received support from the State Department of Health, Adobe Corporation that contributed a tape-editing program, and two Seattle television stations donated $15,000 each. The goal of this

program is to teach media literacy at all middle and high schools in Seattle (McFadden, 1998).

Collins (1999) reports that students at John Glenn Middle School in Bedford, Massachusetts, are learning media literacy. It is a two and a half month course, designed to improve sixth grade students' critical analysis of commercial media and information technology skills, by producing a published web site (Collins, 1999).

The students explored, obtained, planned, developed, and changed data into information, publishing a finished home page for fifth grade students to use. The author mentions that this media curriculum included English instructors, an information technology teacher and a specialist in media technology (Collins, 1999).

Traditionally, teachers have taught students individually, but with increasing technological information in U. S. society, traditional ways of teaching are changing to a collaborative effort. David M. Considine (1994) says, "... media specialists [in Oregon public schools] can serve as the central force and focus [along with the teacher] in our schools not simply for teaching with media, but also about media" (p.24).

The traditional idea of the teacher instructing students is outdated in media education, where collaboration with an information specialist, along with the teacher, will be used to teach media literacy to students in Oregon.

How Schools are Funded

According to an elementary school administration official, the local and state governments fund most public schools across the United States as mentioned in the previous section. Funding by local property taxes means, "that each school district [has] a different source of revenue" (Mr. Jean, personal communication, June 6, 1998). High-income school districts are in a better position to increase their budgets.

A wealthy public school could add a program and maintain it on an annual basis with their resources. A school located in a high property tax area is able to supplement its budget with local funds or contributions. "In a wealthier community it may be easier-not always-but it could be easier to supplement the programs" than a school in a low property tax area (Mr. Jean, personal communication, June 6, 1998).

Mr. Jean observed that if the school is located in an economically depressed neighborhood that school and school district in reality do not have the resources to raise local taxes.

Unofficial Media Literacy Curricula

Some schools have unofficial media literacy programs that are incorporated into other subject matter, or the social science curriculum. For example, Hepburn (1999) notes, "Social studies teachers can cultivate critical viewing, careful listening and critical reading in their students when they integrate media experiences into regular lesson"(p.353). She suggests some questions the middle school social science curricula might include: Ask the students what was the meaning that they received from that particular television show, what is the meaning in a specific news report, and what is the meaning in a certain advertisement. Ask the students what they learned from answering the three-inquiring questions above. Have the students compare television reports with print reports such as "books, newspapers and magazines". Next, ask the students if any of the stories are simplistic, if they found any visuals and words that misinform, or if they

found unconfirmed allegations. Ask the students if television is affecting them or their friends' buying habits by purchasing products they have seen on television (Hepburn, 1995). With these intellectual tools, media literate students might question the activities in the commercial media.

Hepburn (1999) does not see the need for media literacy curricula. She argues that media subject matter, such as the above-suggested questions, is easy to incorporate into the middle school curricula that, " … teaching media literacy in middle grades social studies does not require the addition of a new course" (p. 353). Hepburn says that media literacy can be taught through the middle school curriculum because it is " … already in the social studies curricula—American history; civics; world religions, people, and cultures, (physical and cultural geography); and economic problems" (p.353). Therefore, she believes it should stay within the framework of traditional curricula.

Channel One

Entrepreneur Christopher Whittle created Channel One twelve years ago. He developed a prepackaged reusable

course to teach a real program that schools could use. What Whittle's company did in 1990, was contract with 400 lower income secondary schools to present a 12-minute daily series, that included showing two minutes of advertising to students. In 1990, advertising to children while in school caused an academic and public uproar that continues today. In the United States, practically all the main education groups in 1990 passed declarations in opposition to Channel One. By 1998, 12,000 public schools, and eight million middle and high school students were watching Channel One on a daily basis (Walsh, 2000). In exchange for airing Channel One programming, schools are promised video equipment and other electronic gear they need.

The issue that concerned instructors about Channel One was that it forced children to watch television in school. This caused the General Accounting Office (GAO) to investigate the problem. This landmark study, *Public Education: Commercial Activities in Schools* (Letter Report, 09/08/2000, GAO/HEHS-00-156) reports, "In-school marketing has become a growing industry"(p.8). The reason so many instructors denounced advertising in the classroom is that what easily influences adolescents is what they see on television.

According to the GAO study, "Participating schools must sign a contract agreeing that they will show Channel One's news program-ten minutes of news and two minutes of commercials-ninety percent of all school days in eighty percent of all classrooms" (p.28). The GAO also found that some school officials thought it was wrong and improper to show Channel One's commercial programming to schoolchildren. Some "... officials said their boards had rejected [Channel One], feeling that advertisements were inappropriate for the classroom"(p.29). Some of the instructors that were interviewed did not like the caliber of the broadcasts the children had to watch. One instructor said that he was disturbed by the caliber of the news show more than the advertisements. The instructor mentioned that Channel One programming had changed from less hard news to more featured programs (GAO, 2000). The GAO's investigation found four issues to criticize Channel One's incorporation of programming into the schools. (1) Channel One requires students to watch its commercials for two minutes. (2) By showing commercials to children the school is endorsing products. (3) Channel One turns education into a commodity. (4) Content control is turned over to Channel One programming or advertisers.

On the other side, proponents stated three reasons why they supported Channel One. (1) Channel One shows students a newscast that is topical to students who normally do not watch the news; (2) students are taught media literacy skills on a yearly basis; (3) low-income schools receive free technological resources for showing Channel One programming in the classroom (GAO, 2000).

In short, some low-income schools are financially put into the position of using Channel One to teach media literacy in the classroom on an annual basis.

Critical Thinking

Hooks and Freire link cultural experience to media literacy through the critical thinking process. When abstract and unusable information is stored in the human memory (Freire, 1990) it bears no connection between the whole student and his or her real life experiences (Hooks, 1994); information becomes scattered pieces of data in the whole person. Ideas that are ambiguous, out of time, and confusing do not motivate students to think critically.

Paulo Freire (1990) theorized that critical thinking through liberation and lived experience is self-motivating. "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not

transferals of information" (p.67). Rote memory and ideas pooled in memory without context and connections to the students' culture are abstract; meaningless bits of information they learn are not liberating. Students will have a hard time making sense of and thinking critically when presented with abstract theory and language unless it connects to their lives. Education "is a learning situation in which the cognizable object intermediates the cognitive actors—teacher on the one hand and students on the other" (Freire, 1990,p.67). When information is linked to the culture of the students, the chain between learning and experience motivates students. The connection between the two confirms their existence. Donna E. Alvermann, Jennifer S. Moon and Margaret C. Hagood (1999) argue, " The construction of meaning and pleasure depends on the knowledge of a particular group at a particular time and about a particular popular culture text" or event (p.29). Learning then becomes part of the whole person, mind, body and spirit. It does not separate the student from information; it encompasses and empowers them to be active learners and problem solvers (Hooks 1994). This supports the idea that with an official and stable media literacy

curricula, instructors can teach media literacy by incorporating it into the popular culture of their students.

Popular Culture and Critical Thinking

Mahiri (2001) notes that popular culture instruction is communication through many forms of electronic media such as television, video games, compact disc, the Internet, and movies.

Mahiri also found that some U. S. urban female students were dissatisfied with public school and home schooling methods because both education systems reproduced the mainstream educational curricula of rote learning. The girls "... pursued extensive learning agendas that they felt far surpassed a formal high school education" (p.384). These young students empowered themselves through media literacy and popular culture by using technology to enhance their critical thinking skills. The girls accessed Internet journals and online classes, went out and explored libraries and museums, went to movies, and occasionally attended community college classes. The students produced "... a variety of textual forms like print, pictures, drawings, animation, and sound" (p.382). This type of

independent learning and thinking is " ... highly competitive in college testing and for college admission" (p.384). This approach will teach students to be independent learners and critical examiners of the commercial media.

Julian Sefton-Green (2001) found that teaching media literacy through popular culture to low-income British students highly motivated them to learn. Motivated students created games and had done prior research before beginning a media education class. Yet, Sefton-Green (2001) found that the students, who were being taught a straight media curricula, not popular culture, were unmotivated because they had not done any prior research before attending the course. Both classes did not know how to use information software. Such basic programs as browsing software had to be taught before the classes could move on. The curricula had to be redesigned for the students. Teaching media literacy and critical thinking to British and U. S. students through popular culture seems to empower students to become self-learners.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Survey

A media literacy phone survey was designed for public school principals. However, before the phone survey was conducted, a letter describing this particular project was mailed to the principals in anticipation of the phone survey at their school. (See Appendix A: Letter.)

Title I Funding

This study uses *Title I* legislation to determine which schools are upper-income or lower-income when conducting a telephone survey. The criterion for school officials to determine the poverty level of their school district is by the number of students that come from economically disadvantaged families per school. The Department of Education (1999) lists *Title I* guidelines: schools with incidence at or above 50 percent poverty can apply *Title I* Part A (Title VI is the new amended part of the 1994 *Title I* legislation) funds, with other government funds, to run a schoolwide program " ...to help upgrade the entire educational program in a school..." (p.12).

A California state education official, J. Ring (personal communication, June 3, 1998) notes that her state, "currently uses counts of school age children families receiving [federal aid]" to determine eligibility. She said, in addition, "children [who are] enrolled in free or reduced price meal programs [qualify] for allocating federal Elementary and Secondary Education Title funds to their school districts and schools."

Most high-income school districts do not have enough economically disadvantaged students that qualify for *Title I* (Schoolwide) legislation. Their budget is funded directly from property taxes, which enables high-income schools to add programs without federal financial support.

Sampling

The sample for this study was selected from the *California Public School Directory 2001*. The proposed sample totaled thirty schools broken down into three categories: elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. A random sample was picked from the list of schools. The number forty-five was randomly generated. Every forty-fifth school was picked in each of the three categories of public schools. Ten schools were picked from

each category for a total sample size of thirty. The researcher stipulated the types of schools that would be included in the sample. Traditional schools included all public schools, except alternative schools, learning centers, arts academy, accelerated learning schools, and charter schools, which were excluded from the sample because the schools did not fall within the traditional, sample definition of a public school. This sampling frame was used because it was the most recent list of schools available for the research project.

Instrument and Data Collection

A survey instrument was created by the researcher and approved by The *Internal Review Board* at California State University, San Bernardino. (See Appendix B: Instrument.)

The instrument consisted of fourteen closed-ended questions, each of which required a verbal response of "yes" or "no". The instrument was designed to measure media literacy curricula development in upper-income and lower-income schools. One open-ended question was asked to measure the chances of future addition of a media literacy program to the curricula.

Five demographic questions were asked to measure the ethnic makeup of instructors at the participant's school and district. Demographic data included the ethnic breakdown of the participant's school, the ethnic breakdown of instructors at the school, the ethnic breakdown of the school district, the ethnic makeup of the school administration, and the ethnic makeup of instructors in the school district. (See Appendix B: Instrument.)

The instrument was pre-tested on actual participants who were subsequently debriefed. Three schools were called at random to capture problems with the survey design. However, problems showed up in the first two cases. The problem was that some upper-income schools provided free lunches and received *Title I* funds (Targeted assisted funds) for at risk students. This did not make these schools lower-income because they provided these services. The instrument was modified to include *Title I* funds and then the researcher asked the participant if the school was lower-income or upper-income even if the school received *Title I* funds. If the school received no federal money and did not have any students using the free lunch program, the researcher asked the participant if the school was an

upper-income or lower-income school to verify the income level of the school.

Strengths and Weakness

The researcher found five advantages to using a telephone survey: 1) Mass data can be quickly accessed through a telephone survey. 2) The researcher was able to conduct the interviews from home and at his convenience. 3) A phone survey is low cost. 4) Anonymity put the interviewee more at ease than a face-to-face interview 5) phone surveys could be conducted before, during, or after hours.

The researcher identified four weakness in the telephone survey: 1) the researcher was unable to get in touch with a participant because the person no longer held that position or no longer worked at the location; 2) participants did not return phone calls; 3) participants missed or rescheduled interviews; 4) missed interviews wasted the researchers' time and money (Rea, L. M., & Parker, R. A., 1997).

Procedure

The first part of the data gathering process was to make an appointment with the participant's staff to conduct

a phone survey. The actual interview took place at the scheduled time. During the interview notes were written on the survey form. The surveys were later rewritten to protect the school and officials from harm for answering the questions. The instruments were coded "1" for elementary schools, "2" for middle schools and "3" for high schools to conceal the identity of the individual respondent and his or her school during the transcription of statistical data. The expected time to complete all interviews was eight weeks. The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays made it difficult for the researcher to get the surveys completed. Participants were out of town or not available until after the holidays.

Protection of Human Subjects

The first passage of the survey the researcher read to the participants was the right to informed consent. The last paragraph that the researcher read to participants was a debriefing statement with my faculty advisor's phone number. (See Appendix B: Instrument.)

In this study, the schools were identified as elementary schools, middle schools or high schools. Principals were identified as officials of the school.

After all survey participants were contacted, the researcher destroyed the master list of all schools and the contact sheet with the names, address, phone numbers of the schools. When transcribing the data and doing statistical correlations, the researcher did not know which school was being entered or written about. The researcher did not use specific geographic locations or names of schools or officials. The researcher changed the participants' identity or geographic location to protect their anonymity. The telephone survey did not contain any deceptive or sensitive questions. It was designed to investigate media literacy curricula in public schools.

Data Analysis

In this study, two variables were assessed: the independent variable in this study is the social economic status of the schools. The dependent variable is access to media literacy curricula.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic and Descriptive Features

Thirty schools were called, and of those thirty, twelve principals replied to the phone survey questions. The response was a 40 percent completion rate.

Hypothesis One

The hypothesis that upper-income schools have media literacy curricula was supported.

Table 1 shows the Frequency Scores for School Response on Presence of Media Literacy Curricula. (See Appendix C: Frequency Tables.)

The total response for upper-income schools is (N=6). One elementary school reported no to the presence of media literacy in their school. Two middle schools reported yes to the presence of media literacy in their schools. Two middle schools reported no to the presence of media literacy in their school. One high school reported no to the presence of media literacy in their school.

For the low-income schools the total response to the presence of media literacy in their school is six. One

elementary school reported that it had a media literacy course. Three elementary schools reported no. One middle school reported no to the presence of media literacy. One high school reported no to the presence of media literacy.

In sum, the total schools reporting yes to a media literacy curriculum is three. The total schools reporting no to a media literacy curriculum is nine.

What this means is that two upper-income middle schools and one low-income elementary school have official media literacy curricula. All three schools said they taught media literacy in the library, with the Internet, or in Information Technology class. The advantage of a media literacy curriculum in these schools is that it develops critical examination of text, of advertisements, and of audience, and it develops skills to construct media information. Students learn these techniques, and apply them on a daily basis, like any other course in the curriculum.

Nine schools reported they had no media literacy curricula. Of those nine, four were upper-income schools and five low-income schools. The disadvantage of not having a media literacy curriculum is that rote learning will be the dominant method of instruction in low-income schools.

Most students will not have internalized much information because they never learned it at a deep level. Rote learning is not designed for inquiring about ideas. It is a process for remembering fragments of knowledge. Another approach is that instructors of the above noted upper-income schools incorporate media literacy into the course. The advantage of this is that some students will be exposed to media literacy; they will learn how to analyze and question information at the basic level. The problem with including media literacy into course content is if it is not practiced every day students will forget how to examine, question, and construct complex information.

The result is that two upper-income middle schools reported having a media literacy curriculum. However, the surprise was that one low-income elementary school had a media literacy curriculum. The result is important because it does not support the research hypothesis that only upper-income schools have media literacy curricula.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis of this study is that Upper-income schools let their instructors create class

curricula because they are teaching students to think on their own.

Table 2 outlines the Frequency Scores for School Response on Presence of Instructors Creating Class Curriculum. (See Appendix C: Frequency Tables.)

The Total response for upper-income schools is (N=6). One elementary school reported that none of its instructors created class curriculum in their school. One middle school reported that its instructors create classes. Three middle schools reported that none of its instructors created classes their schools. One high school reported that its instructors created class curriculum with media literacy content.

An instructor created class is more learning-centered than rote learning classes. This means an instructor can tailor the course for his or her students in upper or low-income schools. This type of curriculum is open to a wider variety of teachable subjects. Instructor created curricula are more focused on students, compared to the traditional curricula of rote learning, which is focused on remembering the right answer. Instructor-created classes tend to develop a better relationship between student and instructor. Students in this environment are encouraged to

express themselves and seek direction from the instructor. "In contrast to traditional schools, which presume that knowing students is irrelevant to teaching them, these schools consciously create strategies aimed at understanding students in order to help them learn" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 161). This type of curriculum fosters critical thinking and discovery of information between the student and teacher.

In this study more upper-income public schools reported that they let their instructors create their own curricula. In short, the significance of an instructor created curriculum is that it teaches the student how to approach learning.

For the low-income schools the total response to the presence of instructors creating class curriculum in their school is six. Four elementary schools reported no to the presence of instructors creating class curriculum. One middle school reported no to the presence of instructors creating class curriculum. One high school reported the presence of instructors creating classes.

In sum, the total numbers of schools reporting that they had instructors creating class curriculum was three.

The total schools reporting that they had no instructors creating class curriculum was nine.

This means that most schools reported that they did not let their instructors create class content, which means they taught a traditional curriculum that may have revolved around forms of rote learning. Teaching standards to children means that the schools primarily focus on teaching students to pass the mandated test. These instructors rarely deviate from the course subject material. Most of these schools are low-income and are closed to incorporating new content into instructions.

The importance of instructors creating class curriculum shows that two upper-income schools and one low-income high school use an open approach by letting their teachers create curriculum and add content appropriate to the class. On the other hand, five low-income schools and four upper-income schools use a closed approach to teaching. These schools do not allow their teachers to create class curriculum. This closed method is not easily adaptable to media literacy because it doses not incorporate critical analysis and questioning of text.

The result is that one low-income high school, and one upper-income high school and middle school reported having

instructors-created curricula. This result is important because it does not support the research hypothesis that only upper-income schools have their instructors create class curriculum.

Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis of this study is that upper-income schools have private funding that enables them to add media literacy to the curricula.

Table 3 displays the Frequency Scores for School Response On Presence Of Private Funding. (See Appendix C: Frequency Tables.) The total response for upper-income schools is six. One elementary school reported that it had private funding. Three middle schools reported they had private funding in the school. One middle school reported no private funding. One high school reported private funding.

One upper-income elementary school, three middle schools and one high school have a private funding source.

Access to private funding means that these schools have extra revenue to add or improve academic programs, athletics or school buildings. The upper-income schools will not be dependent on the federal government schoolwide

Title I funding to meet their populations' learning needs. They will have private funding along with donations from wealthy parents to add new programs to the curricula, such as media literacy. In general, upper-income schools provide a high quality education because of the socioeconomic status of the students' parents or the presence of private funding for these public schools. With extra revenue these schools can afford to hire teachers to expand instruction.

In these schools critical thinking and media literacy are important subjects because students and faculty spend most of their time using information technology as the primary mode of instruction, which the school can afford.

In this section six low-income schools reported some private funding. One elementary school reported private funding. Three elementary schools reported no private funding. One middle school reported no private funding. One high school reported no private funding.

In sum, total schools reporting yes to use of private funding is six. The total schools reporting no private funding are six.

This means that most low-income schools reported that they did not have access to private funding. One low-income elementary school reported some private funding. What this

means is that the majority of low-income schools that do not have a private funding source will use government funding to support academic programs and school building. Low-income schools will spend most, if not all, of their general revenue and government funding maintaining the curricula. These schools will not be in a financial position to add media literacy to the curriculum. Schools that qualify for the federal government's *Title I* schoolwide program are free to spend the funds as needed. This program was designed to help low-income schools apply funding to the whole school not to a specific population. The funding is usually spent on acquiring new books and other needed supplies for the whole school.

One low-income elementary school had access to private funding. This is significant because this school will have extra revenue to spend stipulated by the funding source. If the school qualifies for the federal government's *Title I* schoolwide program it will be in the position of enhancing existing programs or adding new programs, such as media literacy to the curriculum. For low-income schools private funding is generally unstable, because the grant ends, and the socioeconomic status of the school cannot make up for the loss of funding.

The result is that one low-income elementary school reported having access to private funding. This is important because it does not support the research hypothesis that only upper-income schools have private funding.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that upper-income schools do have the most media literacy programs. Instructor created curricula and private funding, particularly at middle schools, create a reality that is supported by the literature. It seems that the middle schools are ahead of the elementary and high schools, by either having a media literacy course, or having incorporated it into the social sciences, or into information technology courses. Two upper-income middle school principals said that their schools have a media literacy course that is taught through the school's media technology class located in the library.

Some low-income schools reported opposition to media literacy. An elementary school principal said that the school teaches only the standard curriculum. Another principal said that the school did not have a media

literacy course, and did not ever plan on adding one, and that it is "standards" that the school teaches. Still another principal said that he had never heard of media literacy, and never thought about adding it to the curriculum.

A majority of the principals reported that they did not have a critical thinking class. However, most of the respondents said that critical thinking is taught in conjunction with other classes.

However, school districts must equalize funding before they add an annual media literacy course to their curricula. Any structural educational reform must provide all public school students with equal education opportunity and experience. Without equal distribution of education resources, media literacy will not be a core subject in the public schools; instead, it will be taught in middle school and high school social science classes.

According to Linda Darling-Hammond (1997), low-income schools must fight to maintain their inadequate resources, while upper-income schools have stable funding sources, small classes, and have better paid and qualified teachers with more experience, and better instructional capital. They also have a larger range of superior class offerings.

These upper-income students learn to be active thinkers because of the challenging nature and structure of their schools, which are more concerned with teaching students, rather than cutting services to students, which many low-income schools districts are forced to do. Parenti (1995) also says that low-income districts receive much less money than more affluent ones.

Thus access to a quality public education is available in the suburbs because of the high socioeconomic status of the population that lives there. "What students have the opportunity to learn is typically a function of where they live, what their parents earn, and the color of their skin" (Linda Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.264) and parental aspirations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Annual Media Literacy Classes

Students in annual media literacy classes in the public schools will have gained a deeper understanding of how their media culture is constructed and learned to counter the dominant messages in the commercial media by being skeptical of it. (See Appendix C: Models.)

Implications

The implication of students independently creating media is potentially transformative of society itself. They learn that most media is not neutral, and that it is created to elicit behavior from the audience. Media literate students are more likely to believe advertisers are trying to control their economic activities, and social behavior, by targeting them as consumers or voters. As a result, media literate students are more likely to respond to the media by questioning product advertisements and political commercials. They understand how the political and economic structures of advertisements work to get them to consume and vote or not to vote.

Media literate students will have learned to be skeptical of the commercial media, because it is promoting the establishment's agenda. The commercial media cannot deviate too far from popular ideas and values. Their agenda is to get the population to hopefully behave the way they want them to behave, such as voting for a candidate that promotes the idea of economic success and the platform's ticket, or to buy a certain product. Thus, media literate students are in a better position to make an informed decision about the media they are consuming, and using than the population at large.

Finally, for media literacy to enter the curricula in low-income school districts, federal funding is needed. The same concepts of wiring every school to the Internet should be used. For example, the federal government could offer grants to qualifying low-income schools to develop media literacy curricula. The minimal the federal government should offer, is to train teachers to use information technology, and include in that training media literacy and critical thinking. Upper-income schools can fund media literacy through private and local education funding.

APPENDIX A:

LETTER

November 6, 2001

Robert Chapman
2294 Tedesca DR.
Henderson, NV 89052

Dear Principal Smith,

My name is Robert Chapman. I am a graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino under the supervision of Dr. Mary Texeira, Professor of Sociology.

My thesis involves an investigation of the nature of media literacy in the public school system. The study involves conducting a phone survey of principals throughout California. Your school was chosen randomly from the *California Public Schools Directory 2001.* I would like to call you within the next week to ask you a series of short questions about media literacy and your school. I hope you will give me a few minutes of your valuable time.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at artbob77@msn.com or (702) 614-9730.

Sincerely

Robert Chapman, B. A. Sociology

APPENDIX B:

INSTRUMENT

Media Literacy Curricula Survey

Informed Consent

This phone survey in which you are to participate in is designed to investigate media literacy curricula in public elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. Robert Chapman is conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Texeira, Professor of Sociology. The Institutional Review Board, at California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study. The university requires that you give oral consent before participating in this research.

In this survey you will be asked to respond to fifteen questions. The task should take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. All of your answers will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your answers. All information will be reported in group data only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion in the Spring Quarter of 2002.

Your participation in this phone survey is totally voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during this survey without penalty. When you finish with the survey, you will be read a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. In order to ensure the validity of the study, we ask you not to discuss this study with other participants.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Texeira at (909) 880-5547.

By giving oral consent to this phone survey you acknowledge that you have been informed of, and that you understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and you freely consent to participate. You also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age. Please state your answer to the above statement Yes or No.

Survey

Media literacy is the ability to choose, to understand, to question, to evaluate, to create and/or produce and to respond thoughtfully to the media we consume. It is mindful viewing, reflective judgment...an ongoing process, requiring parents and teachers who are themselves media literate and are nonjudgmental, reflective, yet rigorously valuative in their teaching (Emergency Librarian 25 23-6 N/D'97).

1) Does your school provide free lunches under *Title I*?
2) Does your school have media literacy curricula?
3) Does your school have an unofficial media literacy program, which is taught in conjunction with social studies or is included in any other course work?
4) Do you see a need for a media literacy curricula on an annual basis?
5) Does your school have a critical thinking course?
6) Does your school teach critical thinking with other subject matter?
7) Do your instructors create their own class curricula?
8) Do your instructors teach a traditional curricula in the classroom?
9) Can you tell me the students ethnic breakdown of your school?
10) Can you tell me the ethnic breakdown of the instructors at your school?
11) Can you tell me the total ethnic make up of the school district?
12) Can you tell me the ethnic make up of your school administration?
13) Can you tell me the ethnic make up of instructors in the school district?
14) Does your school have access to private funding sources?
15) Does your school plan on adding an media literacy program to the curricula?

Debriefing

This phone survey does not contain any deception or sensitive questions it was designed to investigate media literacy curricula. In this study two variables were assessed: the independent variable in this study is the social economic status of the schools. The dependent variable is access to media literacy curricula. The purpose of this study is to investigate public elementary schools; middle schools and high schools curricula in upper and lower income school districts, to see which schools have implemented a media literacy program. The survey was designed to control for upper-income schools and lower-income schools by asking the participant if their school uses the federally funded free lunch program. The federal government, to determine which schools are considered low-income schools, uses the free lunch program.

Your response to this phone survey has contributed to the study of media literacy curricula, which will help future researchers who are investigating which segments of society have access to media literacy programs in there schools.

Thank you for your participation and not discussing the contents of the phone survey with other participants. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Texeira at (909) 880-5547. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Dr. Texeira at the end of the Spring Quarter of 2002 at the above phone number.

APPENDIX C:

FREQUENCY TABLES

Table 1

Frequency Scores for School
Response on Presence of
Media Literacy Curricula

	UPPER-INCOME (Yes)	UPPER-INCOME (No)	LOWER-INCOME (Yes)	LOWER-INCOME (No)	TOTALS (N=12)
Elementary	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	25% (N=1)	75% (N=3)	(5)
Middle	50% (N=2)	50% (N=2)	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	(5)
High	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	(2)

Table 2

Frequency Scores for School Response on
Presence of Instructors Creating Class Curriculum

	UPPER-INCOME (Yes)	UPPER-INCOME (No)	LOWER-INCOME (Yes)	LOWER-INCOME (No)	TOTALS (N=12)
Elementary	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	100% (N=4)	(5)
Middle	25% (N=1)	75% (N=3)	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	(5)
High	100% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	(2)

Table 3

Frequency Scores for School
Response to Private Funding

	UPPER-INCOME (Yes)	UPPER-INCOME (No)	LOWER-INCOME (Yes)	LOWER-INCOME (No)	TOTALS (N=12)
Elementary	100% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	25% (N=1)	75% (N=3)	(5)
Middle	75% (N=3)	25% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	100% (N=1)	(5)
High	100% (N=1)	00% (N=0)	00% (N=0)	25% (N=1)	(2)

APPENDIX D:

MODELS

Introduction

The population of a media literate student body, kindergarten through high-school, would look different than a traditional one. There would not be any rote learning to practice.

The First Eight Years

This is the proposed model for teaching media literacy to elementary and middle school students. Sinclair (1996) believes there are four concepts that form media literacy course in elementary and middle schools curricula.

1. Media images are socially constructed because the media industry selects the images and codes of convention. Information in media text does not happen by accident.
2. Media literacy teaches elementary and middle school students about bias, equity and justice in the media and society.
3. Media literacy teaches students to create their own media and learn how pressure from society influences its construction.
4. Media literacy teaches students that the commercial media represent the creators' values and biases.

Sinclair (1996) says the best tool for teaching media literacy to young students is the encoding triangle. The three parts of the encoding triangle consist of text, audience and production techniques. Students would use the triangle as a learning device for organizing, planning and creating the product, and use the triangle to develop an advertisement.

The encoding process works best with groups of students. Students will be able to place their promotional material in the inside of the triangle while they explain the section it belongs to. This method of learning media literacy will give young students confidence in analyzing the media.

In the seventh and eighth grades, media education is more intense than it is in elementary school, because it is based on a performing arts program. Students will focus on the actual creation of media and the other half of the day in traditional academic classes. The middle-grades are concerned with student performance and inquiry (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The seventh grade is where students learn to write proposals and keep a media portfolio. Portfolios allow the "... students the opportunity to see, acknowledge, and

receive credit for their growth, regardless or their level or initial competence" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.116).

In the eighth-grade, students create and produce a proposed media event. "Authentic performance is critical to the development of competence" (Darling-Hammond, 1997 p.115). Students in the eighth-grade, need to be media literate, and highly skilled, because they need to know how to bring an enormous amount of information together to produce a product. Thus, a passing grade in the eighth grade media literacy course consists of a public or private performance and will be judged on the student portfolio.

High School

The high school media literacy curriculum is based on the idea of an academy of arts education. This means that it is a performance based curricula and school.

The high school year portfolio reviews should be required for media literacy courses. These reviews are to suggest ways that students can be more expedient. Also, the reviews will be used to question the student to make sure the student is on track. These reviews cut down on failure and help to ensure a successful grade (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Passing a media literacy course has two steps. First, is the evaluation of the media project. The project might consist of the construction of a website, the production of a book or play or a group project. Second, is a critical review of the portfolio, which consists of revisions of the original proposal for comparison. Also included in the review is an examination of the student's academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

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