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Media Literacy Teacher Talk: Interpretation, Value, and Implementation

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how 10 teachers in a literacy master's program interpret, value, and implement media literacy education following a semester-long course. Interview data are analyzed using the Belenky et al's *Women's Ways of Knowing* framework. While all participants valued what they understood media literacy to mean, some confused ML with technology. Implementation reflected participants' varied understandings. Some participants integrated ML into existing units, which lead students to critical analysis and creation of media. Findings suggest 3 challenges for ML educators: contextual limitations and restrictions, ML content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge.

Keywords: media literacy, ways of knowing, reading specialist, classroom practice

As new literacies emerge and are introduced to classroom teachers they are often met with resistance due to theoretical and practical issues. When teachers do choose to include new literacies, multiple factors, (including the teachers' understanding of the subject matter) may impact what is taught and how it is implemented. We experienced this as a result of a major revision to our Literacy Masters Program in 2005, in which we added a required media literacy course to our program. Since that time, we have collected data on students' reactions to the course, and based on the data, implemented modifications to the course and the program overall to strengthen connections with traditional literacy instruction and other courses in the programs. Our goal is for students to see media literacy as an essential aspect of their literacy program and to consider it an integral part of their instructional practices. This study presents findings that delve into teachers' understandings and classroom applications of media literacy

education after completing the required media literacy education course. Based on the findings we discuss the implications for teacher education.

Theoretical Framework

Media literacy education is an emerging field in the United States with deeper roots abroad. It is formally defined here as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate media in a variety of ways" (Aufderheide 1993). Through the ability to access media, students become acquainted with a variety of sources, and ideally realize that one media source is too limited for making any particular conclusion (Semali 2001). Analysis and evaluation together call for readers of media to look beneath the surface of multimedia, to become visually and audibly literate, and then to make determinations based on complex understandings. Finally, to be fully media literate, it is suggested that students be able to use media to communicate (Pailliotet et al. 2000). That is, students should have opportunities to create media, for this will strengthen their critical viewing

abilities (Michie 1999) much like writing can improve reading. Media literacy honors and validates children's out-of-school literacies (Marsh 2003), which is critical to maintain student engagement. And finally, given the heavily mediated society in which we live, we believe that media literacy can strengthen students' cognitive capabilities to more critically engage in and read their worlds (Freire 1970).

In the course, we expose students to media literacy as defined above, while emphasizing a critical perspective. Torres and Mercado (2006, 260) write, "Critical media literacy is founded on the legitimate role of media to serve the public's right to be truly informed, and thereby serve democracy." This approach calls for an understanding of basic media economics, or the acknowledgement of corporate profit-driven motivations for what is produced in our mass media. At the same time, we show how groups like *Free Press* (see www.freepress.net) operate to reform media and transform democracy. Emphasizing the media "communication" component as a necessary aspect of literacy is also tied to the critical perspective to promote opportunities for citizen journalism or media expression. Given today's new media openness, there are multiple prospects for obtaining audiences to make one's message be heard.

Media literacy education is a natural direction for expanding understandings of literacy, and through literacy, the world in which we live becomes the classroom text. Given the multitude of mediated texts that provide today's students with information, literacy for the 21st century must prepare students beyond decoding, basic comprehension (Goodson and Norton-Meier 2003; Turbill 2002), and preparation for high stakes testing. Indeed, Alvermann and Hagood (2000, 203) specifically urged "incorporating critical media literacy in school curricula, and 48 out of 50 state curricula for K-12 students include components of media literacy" (Kubey and Baker 1999). In fact, the state of Maryland has its own media literacy curriculum, *Assignment Media Literacy*, which was created and aligned with the state's voluntary curriculum in 2001. However, despite the curricular support and theoretical soundness related to integrating media literacy into K-12 classrooms, media literacy is often overlooked or met with resistance by K-12 teachers (Dyson 1997; Xu 2001; Flores-Koulish and Deal 2006, 2008; Marsh 2006).

Therefore, although Torres and Mercado (2006) called for not only including media literacy in K-12 classrooms but also in teacher education programs, there remain many hurdles and media literacy educa-

tion for teachers is still the exception rather than the rule (Flores-Koulish 2004; Kellner and Share 2005). It is therefore understandable that there is a paucity of research that documents how teachers implement media literacy and what teachers and students can learn from it. Millard (2006) describes how six United Kingdom teachers have successfully integrated media into their classrooms, but similar studies based on elementary classrooms in the United States are limited. Given the different context, there is a need to investigate how teachers in the United States interpret and teach media literacy teaching, especially within the current accountability climate, which promotes product over process, and is often antithetical to the aims of critical media literacy education. Thus, we posed three research questions. First, how do Pre-K-12 teachers interpret media literacy as a concept in practice? Second, what value do Pre-K-12 teachers place on learning about media literacy? Finally, how do Pre-K-12 teachers implement media literacy and what struggles do they encounter? Knowledge gained from this study will contribute to the development of meaningful media literacy education for teachers.

Course Context

As noted, our media literacy education course was developed as part of a major Literacy Program revision in 2005. Our goals were to meet the standards established by the International Reading Association/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (IRA/NCATE) for reading specialists and in so doing prepare reading specialists who reflected current understandings of the teaching and learning of literacy and the multiple roles of reading specialists. This entailed a major philosophical shift from a competency-based approach to a constructivist model that recognized and critically examined expanding notions of literacy.

Our students are largely practicing teachers in the surrounding public and private school systems. Not surprisingly, for students who entered the program prior to the revisions, the changes often created a friction as the focus moved from learning "ideas to use tomorrow" to developing a deep theoretical understanding of what literacy is and how to make it accessible for all learners. Recognizing this friction, and establishing an on-going self-study of the revised program we continued to make modifications to the course based on student and faculty input, as well as to build stron-

ger connections between the media literacy course and other required courses. The course continues to evolve and with new readings and modified assignments.

The educational objectives of the course are described explicitly in the syllabus as follows:

At the completion of the course, the student will be able to:

1. Be familiar with the history of media literacy education, both in a U.S. context and internationally.
2. Begin to understand the complex interactions that take place between reader/viewer and media texts.
3. Appreciate the power of the media to transmit culture.
4. Adopt a wider appreciation for media as text.
5. Begin to integrate media literacy education lessons into existing curriculum.

To accomplish the above objectives, assignments, activities, readings, and screenings have been developed explicitly to help students developmentally 1) become aware of their own media experiences and feelings, 2) understand the historical, contextual, and theoretical bases of media literacy, 3) bear in mind various child developmental issues, and 4) consider options for integrating media literacy into the existing curricula. Thus, throughout the semester we move from media literacy content understanding towards pedagogical content awareness.

Specifically, at the beginning of the semester, to reflect on the impact media has had in their lives, students reflect on their past media consumption and experiences with popular culture within a "media memoir." The purpose of this assignment is for the students to recognize the many influences surrounding media/popular culture consumption, from the media themselves, parental involvement, and their own teachers' reactions (or lack thereof). They read articles on new literacies and critical literacy (e.g., Alvermann, Moon, and Haggood 1999, Vasquez 2004), and we view various media literacy videos (e.g., *TV Smarts for Kids*, *Signal to Noise*). Students in the course conduct teacher research in the form of a case study related to children's media consumption to provide them with the opportunity to more deeply appreciate at least one of their student's understandings of the media. Additionally, besides deconstructing media texts within the class, they also work in small groups to analyze a popular television show and produce an academic paper. Finally, after exposing students to a plethora of media literacy resources (e.g., websites for the Media Awareness Network, NAMLE,

ACME, etc.) and practicing its integration with typical curricular content as a final assignment, students integrate media literacy into an existing curriculum, a necessity for our students to view media literacy in an interdisciplinary manner as opposed to an add-on course.

As a framework for analyzing media messages, we expose students early on to key questions in media literacy developed by Hobbs (1998), and we utilize these questions to deconstruct familiar media texts such as current commercials and advertisements in magazines. The class participants use these questions as a framework of analysis for their group television program assignment, and many also integrate the questions within their final curricular units:

1. Who is sending this message and why?
2. What techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in the message?
4. How might different people understand this message differently from me?
5. What is omitted from this message?

We have found that this set of questions is particularly accessible to this population. There is efficiency to their succinctness, yet an open-endedness that allows for our deeper exploration into the critical realm. Further, we work with this set of questions so that the teachers can modify the language for their given student populations.

Methods

To gain an understanding of the larger impact of the media literacy course, we collected interview data, participant artifacts, and student artifacts that reflected the voices and perceptions of classroom teachers who included media literacy in their instruction. Thus, we utilized methods and perspectives from naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory within the qualitative paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Charmaz 2000).

Participants.

Participants were solicited through bulk and personal email messages to students who completed the media literacy education course between 2005-2007. Follow-up phone calls were made to twelve course completers and ten of these completers volunteered to participate. The participants represented grade levels Pre-K through 8, and a variety of teaching situations and schools (see Appendix A). Seven of the

participants were classroom teachers and taught grades Pre-K through grade three and grade six through eight. The remaining participants were specialists and taught grades six-eight life skills, grades K-two at risk, and grades K-two special education. Teaching experience ranged from three to nine years with a mean of 6 years. Nine participants taught in a public school, in one of seven surrounding counties, and one participant taught in a parochial school. One school was designated Title 1, while another was in reconstruction, and yet another earned a Certificate of Excellence.

Data collection.

We utilized three types of data: 1. Semi-structured interviews; 2. Participant artifacts from the Media Literacy course; and 3. Student artifacts based on work assigned by the participants. The interviews served as primary data sources while the participant and student work samples added depth to our understanding of the interview data and provided evidence to confirm or disconfirm it.

Semi-structured interviews were audiotaped in a school setting and transcribed verbatim all by a graduate student. Participants were asked to recall memories of the media literacy course, define literacy, discuss their attempts and challenges at integrating media literacy into their curriculum, and discuss their thoughts on student learning related to media literacy integration. For example, one question asked participants to “describe how you either modified existing curriculum or created new curricular units which included media literacy.”

Data analysis.

Our analysis of the data was a multi-step process. First, we independently and then collaboratively coded the data and identified themes, beginning with descriptive codes related to the research questions and the extant literature and followed by emergent codes, such as “eye-opening.” Next, we adapted the *Women’s Ways of Knowing* framework (Belenky et al. 1997) for teachers introduced to media literacy (see Flores-Koulish and Deal 2008) and based on the data, classified the participants. Finally, we looked for themes within each group for each of the research questions. Throughout the analysis process, we conducted repeated readings in which we compared and revised our coding and looked for negative cases (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

In order to clearly understand this process, we provide a brief explanation of the *Women’s Ways of Knowing* framework as described in an earlier paper (Flores-Koulish and Deal 2008) and how we adapted it for teachers and media literacy. Belenky et al. addressed how women see and function within the world based on their personal epistemologies staged as follows:

- First is “silence” depicting women whose voices are literally silenced as a result of their childhoods where little conversation (and play) existed, and physical interactions replaced verbal ones.
- Next is “received knowledge” where women defer to others and/or experts for knowledge. Concrete, dualistic thinking predominates, while ambiguity is scorned.
- “Subjective Knowledge” or one’s inner voice comes third. Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion, to be heard. There’s a sense of anti-rationalism here, or fear of that which is thought of as “male” logic. “Subjective knowledge: the quest for self” appears to be the second part to above, whereby women break free from past (repressive) contexts in order to re-establish themselves in environments where their voices can be heard. Given the resistance to logic, this righteous neutral stance makes growth all that more difficult.
- The next position is “Procedural knowledge: The voice of reason” that displays itself in those who “engage in conscious, deliberate, systematic analysis” (93). No longer is “male” logic viewed as fearful; on the contrary, it is embraced. Two elements of Procedural knowledge include “Separate and connected knowing.” “Separate” utilizes a set of rational tools of another (an authority), whereas “connected” knowers are ones who seek to empathize with another, to understand why they are rationalizing as they are.
- Finally, “Constructed knowledge: Integrating the voices” conveys the notion that individuals are constructivists who “understand that answers to all questions vary depending on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking” (138). Within this position there is a balance of various rational models with emotional understandings that emanate from the self. Ambiguity is embraced here.

We believe this adapted framework provides one lens through which to view the participants' responses to media literacy. Thus, we adapted and defined dualistic knower (DK), subjective knower (SK), or constructed knower (CK) for our purposes. We theorized that "Dualistic knowers" demonstrate difficulties with nuanced understandings and viewpoints of media texts and conceptualize media literacy as inclusion of media and/or technology. Subjective knowers demonstrate naïve acceptance of various viewpoints and find opportunities to insert references to popular culture. Constructed knowers begin to evaluate and communicate media literacy in new ways and engage students in critical analysis and construction of various texts.

Based on the data we attempted to classify the participants' responses to media literacy within these groups but found it difficult to distinguish between DK and SK. Therefore, we merged DK and SK into one group designated dualistic/subjective knowers (DSK). We recognize that participants can move between groups and depending on the context may be in a different group and this may account for the fluid line between dualistic and subjective knowers. In other words, certain media texts and/or media literacy activities may elicit a deeper, more nuanced understanding by some individuals at one time, while in a different context, that comprehension may be limited. Therefore to recap, our adapted analytical categories and definitions are as follows:

- DSK: demonstrate understandings of media literacy and media texts in very basic ways. For example, these individuals either express complete misunderstanding over the purposes of a media text, and/or make broad claims with little analytical support, an attempt to be inclusive without nuanced understandings.
- CK: acknowledge multiple points of view and perspectives of media texts, thus harkening to the key concepts. Additionally, these knowers bring in fresh analytical lenses to aid their own students in going deeper with their own analyses, thus demonstrating emerging pedagogical content knowing.

Results

We present our results in two parts. First, we will further elaborate on how we used the Belenky (1997) framework to classify the participants as DSK or CK with specific examples from our data. Then, we

will address each of the research questions, providing evidence from the perspective of each group derived from the Belenky framework (i.e. DSK and CK).

Ways of knowing

The data indicate that the participants represented a continuum in their understandings of critical ideas within media literacy education appearing either as DSK or CK. Dualistic/subjective knowers, we proposed, have difficulties with non-traditional and critical understandings and viewpoints of media texts. These types of knowers would indicate a general like/dislike response to media texts. In the case of this particular study, the teachers who still conceptualized media literacy simply as the inclusion of media and/or technology could also fall within this dualistic/subjective category. Specifically, despite their completion of media literacy education, some of the participants in this study did not discuss that media literacy involved the analysis and critique of media texts. They defined media literacy instrumentally with the following quote best capturing this belief: "It's about learning...about all the new technology...an explosion of technology and how to use it in the classroom." So, these knowers lacked the appropriate understanding of the content of media literacy for themselves, and therefore, lacked the pedagogical content knowledge to effectively translate the material to their own students.

Constructed knowers appeared among this group of participants more frequently than the dualistic/subjective knowers. We found that six of the participants interpreted media literacy as a broadening of the traditional definition of literacy. They showed their own abilities to deconstruct texts. They saw the need to engage their students in a critical analysis and deconstruction of various texts. These CK also reinterpreted media literacy for their particular contexts, a quality of CK. For example, Emily struggled with the media literacy key questions (Hobbs 1998) finding that the wording of the questions was too complicated and therefore, beyond the conceptual comprehension level of her second graders. She recognized the need to understand the questions herself conceptually so that she could then re-word them and help her students to understand and apply the questions as they viewed media.

It is important also to note that many participants expressed a transition in their thinking and appeared to become CK, in part, from their experiences in the course. Christine captured this growth aspect when

she stated that she went from believing that the course had to do with different media devices to the messages themselves in terms of “being able to comprehend and analyze different forms of messages.” So unlike DSK, CK here expressed an evolution in their understandings of media literacy education through the course and afterwards.

Interpreting media literacy as a concept in practice.

We characterized four participants as DSK. Despite the readings, discussions, and assignments they completed for the media literacy course they expressed a narrow understanding of media literacy. They conceptualized media literacy as media and/or technology and utilized limited media in their classrooms. For example, Amy responded, “Now, by media literacy you mean using media, implementing an aspect of media into a lesson?” Similarly, Susan stated, “Media literacy is being informed...being able to understand and to use all types of media whether it’s the television, the computer, book, you, print...well, anything like that.” Generally, the DSK attributed a value judgment of good or bad to any media used. This judgment often related to their personal values and preferences. They did not teach their students to view media critically or analyze the media messages.

In contrast, the six participants characterized at varying stages of CK, conceptualized media literacy as critically analyzing and deconstructing messages. Christine explained, “I would say that it’s about analyzing different types of messages and really considering who is creating the messages and their purposes for creating them.” The participants identified as CK selected and analyzed multiple forms of text, such as video and print, for topics of study and adapted content to be developmentally appropriate. As noted, Emily revised Hobb’s five questions (1998) to be comprehensible to her second grade students. The lingering impact of the course was clear to many of these teachers. Madison, for example, said the course pushed her “to be more critical and look at things in a critical evaluative way.” Finally, CK interpreted media literacy as a process through which their students not only learn to critique messages but to produce messages, as well. They involved their students in creating media like video and print advertisements.

Valuing media literacy instruction.

Dualistic/subjective knowers and constructed knowers felt that media texts, often tied to popular cul-

ture, could be motivating in the classroom and enhance student engagement. However, CK viewed this as a foundation for deeper critical engagement, while DSK stopped short of this. For example, DSK Cathy stated, “I think (media literacy) increases their motivation and if their motivation is increased they are going to learn more.” Brandy, another DSK, echoed a similar sentiment, “It (writing about TV and video games) helps their writing because it’s something they are interested in. It sort of motivates them...” In contrast, Madison, a constructed knower, saw the motivational aspect as a means to teach critical thinking. She stated, “...they love looking at magazine advertisements and once they kind of understand what they are supposed to do, then it’s like they point out everything.” In this quote she is referring to the critical questions and textual features. Two other CK recalled how students continued to discuss media literacy tasks two years after learning about media literacy and used their new skills to create media. Both teachers pointed out that the student created media texts (videos) demonstrated creativity, engagement, and critical thinking.

Constructed knowers further reported that media literacy instruction taught critical thinking skills and improved comprehension. Christine explained:

I think it’s definitely a tool for improving comprehension because they really have to comprehend the messages that are coming at them in order to respond to them...and look...who is creating them, that sort of thing...and I think that, like, as a reading specialist many of the kids that I work with do struggle with that. So I think it’s definitely a great way to improve... a big push, like, in my county is higher-level comprehension skills and we need to get kids past the literal recall level and all of that. And I think this is a great way to do it because, you know, immediately they are required to analyze and interpret and all that.

Christine and other CK experiences suggested that the analytical skills gained during media literacy instruction might be transferred to out of school media interactions and to reading and writing instruction, as well.

Constructed knowers also indicated that learning about media literacy was “eye-opening.” Five of the teachers in this group explained that they viewed media and popular culture differently after completing the course. For example, Nancy said:

So it has really opened my eyes, yeah, to a different way of teaching kids how to communicate and how to analyze communications...I think even as

adults we don't realize how we're bombarded with just information and maybe even just images and how many messages are sent through images. So, um, just really learning how to analyze all of that and understand all the hidden messages that are out there.

As a result of the "eye-opening" experience, participants like Nancy felt a responsibility to engage students in critical literacy. Further, participants felt more comfortable and confident discussing popular culture in the classroom. Many of the participants in fact discussed how before the media literacy course they would often ignore children's classroom conversations about popular culture or even ask them to change the subject to "school talk." Heather summed this up as follows:

When they talked about American Idol or things they were watching on TV, I would just, you know, change the subject, like, "Ok. Now let's get back to school!" But now, I actually have conversations with them about it and ask them questions like, "Well, why do you want this person to win?" And you know, talk to them more about it and they enjoy, like, if they're allowed to talk about something else from out of school in school they enjoy that too... And there are so many things outside of school now, that it used to be...you know, "that's the parents' job and the teachers teach in school." But I think it's just so much that influences them outside of school that it's good to talk about that with them... I am realizing now that they see all kinds of things in media and out in the public...that we really shouldn't separate school from outside of school. They need to see connections.

Implementing media literacy in the classroom: Activities and challenges.

Three of the four DSK did not teach the unit developed in partial fulfillment of the course, although two of the participants indicated that they planned to teach their unit in the future. Participants cited multiple reasons, such as pacing guides and lack of resources for not including media literacy in their curriculum. One dualistic/subjective knower, Susan, felt confident that she had integrated media literacy when instead, she had included popular culture without a thoughtful regard for critical analysis or media production. Specifically, she shared with the interviewer how she created a unit on Oprah Winfrey for her students with special needs. She described little about the unit itself that showed critical awareness. For example, her students read a

biography of Oprah, which exposed them to a limited viewpoint, and they stopped there. Susan described how she intended the unit to be thematically related both to African American History month and Women's History month, yet she did not describe activities in which students were engaged in discussions about the multiple viewpoints of this media figure or more, how Winfrey has become a brand. Another dualistic/subjective knower, Cathy, reported that she had successfully integrated media literacy into the required curriculum but did not provide examples.

Four CK reported that they had taught the unit developed for the media literacy class and three planned to use their units again. Their examples were varied and included analyzing messages as well as producing media such as informational videotapes, advertisements, and commercials.

Emily described developing a teachable moment into a lesson, which strengthened her students' critical thinking skills. She explained that she became frustrated that the Scholastic book orders contained so many toys and that her students were more attracted to the toys than the books. She designed a mini lesson that deconstructed the layout of these colorful, attractive order forms in the hopes that her second graders would begin to see how marketing techniques were used to attract their attention. Madison's third grade students also analyzed advertisements and then created advertisements. She explained that her students "looked at other advertisements to see what they did that would persuade a person...and ...I mean we talked about, you know, like writing for an audience and things like that too." Madison was able to blend skills found in the writing curriculum with critical media literacy skills.

Nancy discussed a literature unit she typically taught to her middle school students on Anne Frank and explained how she expanded the unit to analyze the power of printed Nazi propaganda. She thought that this "would interest the students more by looking at the visual images...I limited the amount of language they could use. They were really trying to send their messages through images." She reported that the unit resulted in heightened awareness of propaganda and how successful the ideal combination of pictures and words can be to sway opinions.

Christine integrated critical media literacy into a social studies unit on communities with her first graders. Her students viewed various types of media they might see in their communities, and then took photographs and created a slide show about their school to

convince a hypothetical new family in the community to send their children to their school. Students learned about persuasive techniques used in professional media and applied those strategies to their own work.

Our data indicated that participants in both groups faced challenges in implementing media literacy in their classrooms. Time was the greatest struggle identified by DSK and CK. Participants stated it was difficult to find time to add anything more to the required curriculum, especially the extended time needed for students to become media producers. Pacing guides, test preparation and test administration further limited available time for media literacy instruction. Two or more participants identified four additional challenges: competing home/school values, developmental appropriateness, lack of administrative support, and resources.

Although many of the participants indicated that they wanted to bring together the students' worlds outside the classroom with their work inside the classroom, some perceived competing values of home and school as a potential barrier. Challenges arose when students came to school discussing popular culture texts that are intended for more mature audiences. For example, some of the teachers talked about how their students watched programs like *The Family Guy* at home, and teachers would be stumped or shocked in terms of how to respond when students brought up the shows in class. Cathy discussed a scenario in which a group of girls were talking about how they thought it was important that girls and women wear make-up as perpetuated by the Bratz dolls. Cathy felt that if she refrained from judgment that the girls would believe that she condoned this sentiment, and so she felt compelled to share that this was a truth she did not believe. Emily struggled with the critical ideas in the media literacy course that suggested that it is acceptable for teachers to discuss issues such as racism, homosexuality, and sexism in schools whereas both Madison and Christine were resolute in their pursuit of presenting multiple perspectives without judgment. Emily stated,

(All kids) are experiencing these things (i.e., negative or conflicting influences in popular culture) and we (teachers) have a responsibility to address them and talk about them. And, you know, talking about them isn't condoning them, but it's addressing the fact that they are out there and why are they there and what are

they doing and what impact does it have on our lives, that sort of thing. So that was definitely like a shift in theory for me.

A related concern was that some children were simply not ready to think about media and popular culture in complex ways. Christine felt that "a lot of the kids just accept what they hear so literally they don't necessarily consider who is creating it and why" and perhaps young children were not ready to grapple with critical ideas.

Additionally, many of the participants discussed the school's administration as powerful to act either as a green or red light for media literacy. Some teachers talked about the challenges posed by their school administrators and described encountering red tape when they tried to bring media and popular culture texts into the classroom. Emily expressed fear and not wanting to "get in trouble" for including aspects of media and popular culture in the curriculum. Heather summed up administrative concerns stating, "The hardest thing is.... just getting the administration to back you up because it's gonna take time and it's gonna be creative and we may, um, go off the curriculum a little bit on the pacing guide." Heather's statement goes beyond concerns over administration to revisit the complications posed by time within the accountability climate.

Through class discussions in the media literacy course, teachers became aware of the resource inequity between schools. Some participants felt socioeconomic constraints at schools reflected inequity between schools based on socio-economic factors. For example Amy expressed total bewilderment at the idea of an Interactive White Board, when her peers in the media literacy class talked about their usage of them. As well, Amy described how she frequently shows filmstrips to her students at an urban Catholic school. Amy and others indicated that resources were a barrier because they did not have access to the materials and equipment for effective media literacy, despite the fact that during the course many readily available low budget options were specifically introduced.

Discussion

Similar to the introduction of other new curricular content (e.g. multicultural education, critical literacy), our data suggest that interpretation varied across all participants, as well as within the DSK and CK groups. A participant's prior knowledge and experiences, personal values, and openness to new ways of knowing mediated each participant's understanding

and implementation of media literacy education. It is therefore not surprising that some participants did not distinguish between media literacy and using technology in the classroom while other engaged their students in critical analysis and creation of media.

The participants valued media literacy for three main reasons: it was motivating to students, it taught critical thinking skills, and it was an “eye opener.” However, only CK valued the critical thinking and “eye-opening” aspect of media literacy, while all participants valued the motivating aspects. Dualistic/subjective knowers did not interpret media literacy as critically analyzing media and messages and it is therefore understandable that they did not relate media literacy to teaching critical thinking or consider it an “eye-opening” experience. It seems then that their content knowledge of media literacy was still quite limited.

Implementation of media literacy varied greatly between the DSK and the CK. Only one dualistic subjective knower taught the unit developed for the course, although two participants indicated that they planned to teach their units in the future. Within this group, participants cited pacing guides and limited resources as reasons for not teaching media literacy and the few examples cited provided evidence of their narrow interpretation of media literacy. In contrast, the CK described relevant and creative approaches to including media literacy in their curriculum. They provided multiple rich examples from their English, language arts and social studies lessons, as well as teachable moments.

Implications

Our results suggest how teachers interpret, value, and implement media literacy poses three challenges for media literacy educators: contextual limitations and restrictions, media literacy content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. In contrast to the literature on teachers’ response to media literacy (Flores-Koulish and Deal 2008; Marsh 2006), participants in this study were not resistant for pedagogical reasons. While not all participants implemented media literacy in their classrooms, all expressed that they valued media literacy. Participants who did not teach media literacy pointed to contextual obstacles such as time, conflicting home/school values, developmental appropriateness, administration, and limited resources. However, participants did self-select to be part of the study and those course completers who are resistant for pedagogical reasons may have chosen to not volunteer.

While media literacy appears to face the same contextual obstacles as other non-high stakes assessment curricula, our data suggest that subject matter or media literacy content knowledge was also an important factor. Four of the participants incorrectly interpreted media literacy as simply the use of media and/or technology in the classroom. While they indicated that media literacy was motivating for their students, the data indicated that they really meant that using technology or viewing media was motivating. Understanding of the subject matter is critical as it impacted not only how the participants interpreted media literacy and the value placed on it, but also, how it was implemented. Herein lies a key challenge for media literacy educators, a challenge that is widely acknowledged within teacher education—how to develop deep content knowledge in a single semester long course. As Lacinna (2005/2006) stated, teachers need to be creative, or “think in new ways,” to help students analyze media messages through innovative instruction and to do this they must possess sufficient content knowledge.

Constructed knowers recognized a need to help their students develop a critical stance and become critical consumers and creators of media rather than remain only recreational consumers of media. The comments and curricular adaptations of three of the CK showed deep understanding of the content. Their subject knowledge was sufficient to make them concerned about adapting media literacy to the developmental level and interests of their students, indicating that they also possessed pedagogical content knowledge (e.g. knowing how to present subject knowledge so that it is understandable). To this end, what types of readings, discussions, and assignments best convey a theoretical foundation from which to build a thorough understanding of media literacy and develop pedagogical content knowledge?

Based on the data, we suggest the need for future research that reviews the literature on teacher development and change in related fields such as critical literacy, technology, and multicultural education to identify parallel approaches that may be successful for media literacy. Additionally there is a need for case studies that investigate why some media literacy students “get it” and others do not. These case studies can add to the extant literature by probing how prior knowledge, teacher-efficacy, beliefs and attitudes, and context influence the development of subject and pedagogical content knowledge following coursework or professional development on media literacy education.

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