Available online at www.jmle.org

JMLE

The National Association for Media Literacy Education's
Journal of Media Literacy Education 7(3), 73 - 92

What Do Facts Have to Do with It? Exploring Instructional Emphasis in Stony Brook News Literacy Curriculum

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Abstract

An analytic matrix comprised of multiple media literacy teaching and learning principles is conceptualized to examine a model of news literacy developed by journalism educators at Stony Brook University. The multidimensional analysis indicates that news literacy instructors focus on teaching students how to question and assess the veracity of news texts, and their approach favors cognitive skill development over other ways people make meaning of media messages. Based on these findings, a cognitive theory of news literacy is proposed as a means to situate the journalistic methods and mindsets that informed the Stony Brook curriculum within the parameters of established media literacy education theories and practices.

Keywords: *news literacy*, *media literacy*, *journalism education*, *Stony Brook University*

News literacy is a relative newcomer to media literacy education even though instruction on teaching students how to access, analyze, evaluate, and, in some cases, create news media messages has been part of media literacy education research and practice for decades. What is new is the label *news literacy*—a label that emerged in journalism education circles in 2006 and media literacy education communities shortly thereafter. RobbGrieco and Hobbs (2013) identify two emerging news literacy paradigms: Global and American. Global news literacy programs encourage macro-level inquiry of news issues—issues such as ownership, ideologies, and institutions that may influence news production practices. American news literacy pedagogies that take a "Journalism School" approach include lessons on freedom of the press and news values, and they offer tools designed to assess news texts (p. 22).

The American approach to news literacy is embodied in the leadership of Howard Schneider, who is founding dean of the Stony Brook University School of Journalism. Schneider came up with the idea to teach non-journalism majors about the principles and practices of the press shortly after he ended a more than 35-year career as a journalist at *Newsday* and joined academe. In his early experiences with students, he found that many of them could barely identify news, let alone critically analyze it, so he, along with several other Stony Brook journalism faculty members, designed a freshman-level course

aptly called News Literacy. Schneider (2007) reasons that young citizens would benefit from learning the information processing skills of a seasoned newspaper reporter and editor because the speed and abundance of information in the digital age makes it difficult to separate high quality, fact-based journalism from everything else. More than $3 million was raised to support the development, instruction, and expansion of the Stony Brook approach to news literacy, including a $1.7 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.[1] The foundation's stipulation that 10,000 Stony Brook undergraduates complete the news literacy course transformed Schneider's largely intuitive instructional idea into one of the most ambitious and well-funded experiments in modern media literacy education.

Even so, the Stony Brook model remains a largely unexamined phenomenon. Much of the published work on the curriculum has been anecdotal (Loth 2012; Klurfeld and Schneider 2014; Finder 2007) as have critiques of it (Hobbs 2010b, 2011b). In addition, it seems as though the field of media literacy education as a whole lacks a method to systemically assess how theory, knowledge, instructional activities, and information-processing styles intersect. As Potter (2010) notes, the most frequently cited purpose of media literacy education is the development of critical thinking skills. At the same time, he finds that these skills are infrequently spelled out and, as a result, critical thinking is used as an "umbrella idea for an unspecified conglomeration of mental processes" (p. 680). This ambiguity leads Potter to conclude that articulations of specific skills and kinds of knowledge in media literacy programs are rare. This study seeks to address these issues by: (1) developing an analytic framework to identify and explore instructional emphasis in a specialized approach to media literacy education; and (2) examining the Stony Brook news literacy curriculum using the framework as a means to illuminate and understand the knowledge and skills emphasized in the pedagogy along media literacy terms.

Review of Literature

Media literacy refers to an ability to critically analyze media messages that is developed through instructional interventions grounded in a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to, media effects, media aesthetics, critical/cultural studies, values education, and civics instruction. In brief, there is no one way to define, teach or assess media literacy, although a dominant definition of media literacy as a skill has emerged in the United States: To be media literate, means one has developed an ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate media messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide 1993). Variants of this definition and descriptions of instructional and assessment programs designed around it permeate media literacy education or "MLE" discussions in the United States.

Different scholars use different frames to conceptualize the field of MLE. For example, reflecting their focus on MLE in K-12 education, RobbGrieco and Hobbs (2013) place the access, analyze, evaluate, and create definition at the center of an illustration that attempts to provide a broad view of the increasingly popular and thereby increasingly diverse MLE field. In the illustration, the aforementioned definition links two MLE conceptual clusters: Protectionism and empowerment. Media and public health literacies, media reform movements, digital ethics and online safety advocates, and critical media literacy programs are found in the protectionism category, while visual, news, information, and digital literacies in addition to youth media, broadband access, and digital media and learning are seen in the empowerment group. Protectionism approaches are described as education programs aimed at guarding against the perceived ill-effects of media messages; alternatively, empowerment pedagogies position MLE as a way for citizens to question power structures and thereby affect social and institutional change.

Using theories from the humanities and communications scholarship, Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (1999) focus on specialized theories and knowledge that guide MLE practices in their synthesis of the most common approaches to media literacy instruction. According to the authors, instruction on how to identify and analyze ideology in media messages is informed by cultural studies and thereby seeks to teach students how to recognize and challenge oppressive social structures and stereotypes created and perpetuated by the media. Autobiographical analysis instructional methods use personal experiences, values, lifestyles, and decisions as pedagogical reference points to spur discussion and investigation. Nonverbal analysis lessons focus on critiquing the meaning of unspoken communication in media messages such as gestures and facial expressions. Mythic approaches to media literacy skill development encourage students to identify and analyze allegorical elements in media programming that express deep and commonly held beliefs about culture. Instruction on how to analyze production elements emphasizes interpretation of media presentations through the examination of style features such as editing, composition, point of view, angle, graphics, and the use of sound and special effects. Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan contend that these five general approaches to media analysis teaching enable one to "see content from different perspectives and depending on the specific area of study, one approach may be more useful than others (xi)."

Along similar lines, Zettl (1998) argues that MLE too often focuses on media content instead of form and thus puts forth a theoretical basis for an approach that uses media aesthetics knowledge to guide lessons about television viewing. More specifically, Zettl proposes a multi-tiered hierarchical contextual media aesthetics model that limits instruction to four levels of analysis: elements of screen images, how the images are structured, how the images are perceived, and how the images fit into other analytic frameworks. For Zettl, foundational assumptions that inform these levels of analysis are integral to the development of mental maps students refer to as they develop sense-making habits about television. To express this point differently, he does not suggest that students analyze a comic book or radio news story following the prompts, and therefore he argues that learning outcomes and analytic strategies for MLE should change as the medium and/or genre changes.

The ways people process information make up what Potter (2008) refers to as the four domains of media literacy understanding. These domains include: cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral. Cognitive processing of information denotes more traditional media literacy skills such as analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstracting. The emotional domain refers to feelings created by the media, and thus media literacy pedagogy designed with this in mind aims to teach people how to become more aware of feelings generated by media content. Aesthetic processing concerns developing an appreciation for the quality of craftsmanship and artistic merit of media content. Zettl's (1998) contextual media aesthetics model described above serves as a useful example of an approach that lies primarily in the aesthetic domain. The final learning domain, according to Potter, is moral, which refers to values embedded in media that provide audiences with cues for making judgments.

Another schema developed by Potter (2004) that is relevant to this study is his cognitive theory of media literacy. The theory is based on the premise that there are three mental building blocks that influence perception, selection, and interpretation of media. The first and most important building block, according to Potter (2008), is the personal locus, which refers to individual decisions about information-processing and media content selection. The second building block is knowledge structures. Knowledge structures, or sets of information in a person's memory that guide media sense-making and are based on previous knowledge about media and knowledge gleaned from MLE instruction. Potter's third and final building block consists of more traditional media literacy skills such as analysis and synthesis. Potter

argues it is useful to make students aware of these building blocks so they can become more mindful with media.

Much like MLE, there is no one way to define, teach or assess news literacy. That being said, a dominant paradigm in news literacy instruction emerged after Howard Schneider created the news literacy curriculum at Stony Brook University in 2006. Stony Brook educators define news literacy as the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports. They state that the news consumption habits of students change and their awareness of current events increases as a result of participation in the course. Miller (2011) adds that news literacy students become more knowledgeable about politics and more interested in civics, although there is no published, peer reviewed research substantiating these claims.

Published research on the Stony Brook program includes Loth's (2012) descriptive account of the curriculum, Klurfeld and Schneider's (2014) reflections on how they developed and taught the course, and Hobbs'(2010b, 2011b) critiques in which she argues that the news literacy pedagogy is nostalgic propaganda from the old guard of journalism, which ignores complex economic and political realities that make it difficult for journalists to fulfill their social mission of informing citizens. To examine the Stony Brook program, Fleming (2014) used interviews, observations, and document data, finding that news literacy as taught to undergraduate students at Stony Brook is designed to teach students how to access, evaluate, and analyze news stories as well as appreciate an investigative and accurate press. As a result, a more refined definition of news literacy based on the Stony Brook experience emerges: News literacy is the ability to access, evaluate, analyze and appreciate journalism. Fleming also reports that students demonstrated high levels of engagement in classes, and developed deeper, more nuanced understandings of journalism. It should be noted, however, that the study did not measure the efficacy of the curriculum; instead, it focused on stakeholder, including student, perceptions of it.

Ashley, Maksl, and Craft (2013) formulate a "News Media Literacy" or "NML" scale to measure news media literacy. The instrument is informed by a similar scale used to assess smoking media literacy (Primack et al. 2006). The NML scale divides awareness about news issues into three categories: authors and audiences, messages and meanings, and representation and reality. To assess the reliability of the NML scale, more than 300 undergraduate students were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements about news media that were primarily informed by critical media literacy perspectives—questions such as: (1) The owner of a media company influences the content that is produced; (2) A story about conflict is more likely to be featured prominently; and (3) Individuals can find news sources that reflect their own political values. Of note, critical media literacy educators aim to teach students how to critique corporate ownership and influence of media organizations, and how to identify and challenge damaging depictions of race, class, and gender in media content (Kellner and Share 2007).

In another study, Maksl, Ashley and Craft (2015) define news media literacy as the "knowledge and motivations needed to identify and engage with journalism" (29). The definition stems from a study that both builds on and deviates from their NML scale work. Instead of using the authors and audiences, messages and meanings, and representation and reality framework and critical media literacy as theoretical optic, the researchers turn to Potter's (2004) cognitive model of media literacy for conceptual cues to create a survey designed to measure NML knowledge. The instrument focuses on an individual's awareness of news media exposure; their perceptions of news media influence; their knowledge about news media production; and their motivations to access and analyze news media. They studied 508

teenagers in a major metropolitan area who were interviewed by phone, finding that teenagers who kept up with current affairs also had high levels of NML.

The Ashley, Maksl, and Craft studies are important because they are among the first empirically sound and statistically significant attempts to define and measure NML knowledge. At the same time, the theoretical frameworks that inform each NML instrument differ. In one study, content is at the center of analysis (Ashley, Maksl, and Craft 2013); in the second study, individual motivations, perceptions and decision making are front and center (Maksl, Ashley, and Craft 2015). These studies are rigorous and set high standards for news literacy assessment practices as the field moves forward. However, there is no discussion of instructional pedagogy and practice. That is, the researchers offer no link between a clearly defined pedagogy and NML knowledge or skill development. Thus, it seems the knowledge about news measured, or lack thereof, is primarily in response to personal experiences and broader culture, not a sustained instructional intervention.

Instruction is addressed in Mihailidis' (2012) edited text, *News Literacy: Global Perspectives for the Newsroom and the Classroom*. The book offers theoretical and practical insights into teaching critical news analysis skills to students amidst sweeping changes to news production and consumption patterns around the world. Using a concentric model for 21st century news, Mihailidis argues that as news industries change so must MLE instructional interventions that focus on news because technology-savvy citizens now use mobile devices to receive and share information instantaneously; they take advantage of participatory tools that increase competition for information and attention; and they easily spread information they retrieve or collect themselves. Mujica's (2012) chapter on a dynamic web-based news literacy curriculum used at the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change in Austria, and Melki's (2012) experiments with integrating social science research concepts and multimedia production lessons into media literacy classes in Lebanon, are among the pedagogical models described in the text. Additional exploration of the pedagogy of news literacy is vital to the future of the field.

Purpose of the Study

The first goal of this study is to develop an analytic framework to identify and assess instructional emphasis in a specialized approach to media literacy, such as the Stony Brook news literacy curriculum. The second goal of the study is to utilize the framework to examine the Stony Brook news literacy model as a means to gain a more nuanced, multiperspectival understanding of the curriculum within the parameters of established and emerging media literacy theories and practices. These objectives are reflected in the following aim and related research question that guided data collection, organization, and analysis:

Aim: Develop a multidimensional and multiperspectival framework to identify and assess instructional emphasis in a specialized approach to media literacy education.

Research Question: In relation to media literacy education, what is emphasized in the Stony Brook news literacy curriculum?

Data Collection, Organization, and Analytic Strategies

Qualitative methodology principles and protocols guided data collection, organization, and analysis (Merriam 1998; Creswell 2005; Yin 2006). During a fall 2010 site visit, I collected hundreds of news literacy documents and observed 26 classes, activities, and meetings. I interviewed 28 stakeholders including administrators, instructors, students, and news fellows. At Stony Brook, news fellows are PhD students from disciplines outside of journalism who were given a stipend to run recitations, assess assignments and examinations, and find instructional examples of news stories that demonstrate and/or violate news literacy principles. All of the news fellows, undergraduate students, and part-time instructors interviewed were assigned pseudonyms; all of the news literacy administrators and full-time lecturers agreed to be identified in work resulting from the research.[2]

To analyze the data, I used Nvivo, a qualitative data management software program. Nvivo enables researchers to conduct code-based inquiries, develop and display dynamic documents, store and link memos that capture theorizing about data, visualize connections between data categories through the creation of models, and track of their movements within the data (Bazeley 2007, 2009). Codes are labels that allocate units of meaning to data. Code categories typically reflect the purpose of a project and attempt to provide answers to its research questions (Merriam 1998). In Nvivo, the term *node* refers to the labels given to categories of data, while coding is the process that puts data into virtual node containers.

The ability to label, track, retrieve, and connect and compare data with Nvivo allows investigators to seamlessly move beyond the most common and basic level of analysis in qualitative research, description. The next and more sophisticated level is to create a classification system through category construction and comparison. Creating and comparing categories is an intuitive, yet systematic process that is informed by the study's purpose, its theoretical orientations, the investigator's background, and the "meaning made explicit by the participants themselves" (Merriam 1998, p. 179). The third level of analysis includes making inferences, constructing models, or developing theory. Miles and Huberman (1994) comment that the theory building process allows qualitative investigators to move up "from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual view of the landscape. We're no longer just dealing with observables, but also with unobservables, and are connecting the two with successive layers of inferential glue" (p. 187). Nvivo's interactive design and dynamic digital database allows researchers to look at the same data from different participant perspectives, disciplinary standpoints, and theoretical angles thus leading to a more comprehensive, multiperspectival approach to scholarly inquiry. Best and Kellner (2001) argue that looking at evidence from different perspectives is advantageous because it "forces one to see, experience and interpret phenomena in a multiplicity of ways and thus contributes to a postmodern vision that frees one from partial or restricted views" (p. 53).

Along these lines, I used three distinct, yet complementary analytic strategies to address the study's aim and research question. The first strategy included creating categories informed by the major approaches literacy instruction identified by Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (1999) and Potter's (2008) four domains of media literacy understanding. Data were coded to those categories during the second analytic phase, and new categories or nodes were created when patterns and trends in the data did not match the established media literacy education axioms. The results from these two steps informed the final level of analysis, theory building. A cognitive theory of news literacy based on the Stony Brook curriculum and Potter's (2004) cognitive theory of media literacy is proposed in the discussion section of this study.

Research Setting

Founded in 2006, the School of Journalism at Stony Brook University, which is located on Long Island, 60 miles east of New York City, is the only undergraduate journalism program in the State University of New York system. In less than ten years, the school attracted more than 300 majors, started a Master of Science program, and generated millions of dollars in grants to assist in the development, instruction, and expansion of news literacy both as a subject of study and as a new "demand side" idea in journalism education. Howard Schneider, founding dean of the school, argues that the news literacy course he designed would help journalism programs "build a future audience that would recognize and appreciate quality journalism (2007, p. 67).

The stated purpose of the 14-unit, general education[3] credit-bearing freshman "News Literacy" class is to teach students how to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports, so they can make a judgment, reach a conclusion, or take an action. The conceptual flow of the course as reflected in the titles of the units and associated learning outcomes is shown on Table 1. Based on a review of the Stony Brook News Literacy Digital Resource Center in spring 2015, there is little evidence of substantive changes to the curriculum since the fall 2010 site visit when 1,230 students were enrolled in the news literacy course across seven large lecture sections, and 43 smaller, discussion-based recitations. The purpose of the center, which is funded by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, is to help facilitate the spread of the Stony Brook curricular model to other college campuses and into high schools by providing free access to instructional materials such as PowerPoint presentations, discussion prompts, and homework assignments.

The only significant adjustment to the curriculum between fall 2010 and spring 2015 is found in unit #13. In fall 2010, the unit was called "The Internet and News" and its lessons looked at online news sources and blogs. By spring 2015, the unit's title had changed to "Deconstructing Social Media," and the focus of instruction had shifted to analyzing social media sources and finding reliable information using them. The other noteworthy development since fall 2010 is the 10,000 student enrolment mark was reached in fall 2014, eight years after the Knight Foundation announced its $1.7 million investment that required 10,000 students take the course (see Stony Brook University 2006).

Methods

To develop a comprehensive analytic framework aimed at identifying and exploring instructional emphasis while acknowledging and respecting the multitude of disciplines attracted to MLE, I used Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan's (1999) synthesis of the major media literacy approaches to instruction and Potter's (2008) domains of media literacy understanding. In practice, this means that data were coded to nodes in Nvivo that demonstrated characteristics of Potter's (2008) domains (cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral) and the approaches (ideological, autobiographical, nonverbal communication, mythic, and production elements) explained by Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (1999). The node categories were then divided into two conceptual planes: learning and teaching.

Along the learning plane, cognitive understandings refer to intellectual processes and skills including analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, and synthesis. Thereby data coded to the cognitive node contained references or inferences to these skills. The next level is emotional. Data coded at the emotional node alerted students to techniques used in news to manipulate or elicit

Table 1
News Literacy Units

Unit #1: What is News Literacy, and Why Does It Matter?
- o   Situate news in personal, social, and cultural contexts
- o   Define news literacy and break down the meaning of reliable information

Unit #2: The Power of Information
- o   Explore the desire to receive and share information
- o   Examine the role of technology
- o   Understand the importance of freedom of expression to democracies

Unit #3: The U.S. News Media: Too Much Freedom, or Not Enough?
- o   Understand the philosophical and practical underpinnings of journalism in the U.S.
- o   Examine the presumed and assumed responsibilities of the press in democracies

Unit #4: Know Your Neighborhood—What Makes Journalism Different
- o   Recognize the key values of journalism: Verification, independence, and accountability
- o   Differentiate journalism from other information sources with news neighborhood grid

Unit #5: What is News and Who Decides?
- o   Examine news judgment and the decision-making processes of journalists
- o   Identify and question the motives that drive journalistic decision-making

Unit #6: Opinion Journalism
- o   Differentiate between news reports and opinion in news
- o   Name the purpose of opinion journalism

Unit #7: Balance, Fairness, and Bias
- o   Understand the concepts of fairness, balance, and bias in news texts
- o   Analyze news texts based on the concepts of fairness, balance, and bias

Unit #8: Truth and Verification
- o   Distinguish between direct and indirect evidence and assertion and verification
- o   Compare how journalistic notions of truth differ from scientific understandings of truth

Unit #9: Evaluating Sources
- o   Distinguish between categories of sources in news narratives
- o   Assess evidence provided by sources in news texts

Unit #10: Deconstructing the News
- o   Detect inconsistencies in news reports using news literacy principles and frameworks
- o   Test to see if conclusions in news reports are supported by the evidence provided

Unit #11: The Power of Images and Sound
- o   Judge how images and sounds in news reports influence audiences
- o   Explore how digital technologies can alter images and sounds in news reports

Unit #12: Deconstructing TV News
- o   Determine how news literacy deconstruction elements apply to television news
- o   Think critically about television news reports and production elements

Unit #13: The Internet and News
- o   Examine the new opportunities and responsibilities of digital age news consumption
- o   Apply news literacy APC (Authority, Point-of-View, Currency) in web content analysis

Unit #14: The Future of News
- o   Discuss what it means to be news literate
- o   Explore how to pay for investigative journalism in the digital age

For more information on the curriculum, visit the Stony Brook University Center for News Literacy:
http://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/

emotional responses in audiences. The aesthetic domain denotes learning about the quality of media content, as judged by professional content producers. Data that demonstrated critical appreciation of journalism were coded at the aesthetic node. The final dimension is moral, which suggests an increased awareness about values. In the context of news literacy, data that communicated messages of morality, civic duty, and social responsibility were coded at the moral node.

Along the instructional approach plane, data that demonstrated lessons on media ownership, race, class, and gender in news were coded at the ideological node. Evidence that referred to individual experiences, values, lifestyles, and decisions were coded at the autobiographical node. Nonverbal communication pedagogies zero in on communication cues expressed through body language, facial expressions, and eye movements thus data that reflected this approach were coded at the nonverbal node. Data coded at the mythic node demonstrated an understanding of supernatural phenomenon, heroic exploits, and transcendent acts in news. Data coded at the production elements node suggested that students were taught how to examine the assembly of news texts whether they were print, broadcast, or online.

The coding process revealed that two of the teaching approaches identified by Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (1999) were not relevant to news literacy: nonverbal and mythic. No data were coded at either category. This was likely for two reasons. First, news literacy instructors focused heavily on the analysis of text-based journalism, thereby limiting opportunities for nonverbal analysis that is most often associated with television and film. Second, the news narratives used in the course and the frameworks designed to analyze them did not demonstrate mythic themes. News was positioned as non-fiction and the texts used in instruction were much shorter in length than more traditionally mythic media representations such as feature films and books. The nonverbal and mythic perspectives were thus removed from the matrix and a factual category was added.

The factual node was created in response to memos that tracked trends in the data. Memos are notes aimed at capturing the thinking of the researcher while gathering or evaluating evidence. This proves to be helpful in the development of propositions and theory building when memories may have faded, but the logic behind key decisions and ideas is captured (Miles and Huberman 1994). As analysis progressed, it became clear that none of the media literacy approaches identified by Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (1999) touch on how to assess the veracity of information, yet that was what the news literacy pedagogues at Stony Brook hoped to achieve.

The interviews revealed that the journalists who taught news literacy overwhelmingly viewed journalism as a fact-finding methodology; therefore news literacy is for all intents and purposes a fact-finding pedagogy, and a node category was needed to reflect this philosophy. The researcher experimented with other labels for the new category to be included in the matrix –labels such as truthful, reliable, and credible—but none seemed to capture what was really going on in news literacy classrooms more than an emphasis on facts. As such, any interview excerpt, observation note, activity, lesson, assignment, or examination that referenced factual, reliable or credible information was coded at the factual node. Once the categories were set, a unique-to-Nvivo matrix query that combined data coded in accordance with the media literacy principles mentioned above and the newly created factual category was completed.

Examining the Stony Brook News Literacy Model

To examine instructional emphasis in the Stony Brook news literacy curriculum in relation to MLE, a matrix query in Nvivo was generated. Matrix queries report on the frequency of data coded to specified categories, and they also explore the relationships between the categories along each conceptual plane. Bazeley (2007) comments, "Nvivo matrices have particular value in that they provide both numeric summary information and also access to the underlying text, thus maintaining a connection with the evidentiary database. The numbers will tell you *how many* or *how often* something varied; the text will tell you *how* something varied (p. 204)." The results of the query are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Media Literacy Analytic Matrix and Results

Approaches to Instruction

		Ideological	Autobiographical	Production Elements	Factual
Learning Domains	Cognitive	5	22	17	44
	Emotional	3	7	2	0
	Aesthetic	0	0	3	1
	Moral	1	6	2	3

Teaching and learning emphasis in news literacy is revealed by three distinct yet complementary vantage points within the matrix. The first is the total number of references coded at the four categories along the instructional approach continua. The results suggest that news literacy instruction focuses primarily on teaching students how to analyze the veracity of information in news texts, as per the 48 data excerpts coded at the factual node. The data coded at the factual node intersects with each of the domains of learning except emotional. The next most frequently coded instructional approach is autobiographical with 35. This is followed by production elements with 25 and ideological with nine.

Results along the domains of learning plane reveal a second layer of emphasis. With 88 data excerpts coded at the cognitive node, the development of information-processing skills is clearly favored. There is also evidence of teaching students how to understand news on emotional and moral levels with 12 coding incidences each, and there is slight evidence of students learning how to understand news from aesthetic perspectives. But by and large, the matrix query determines that news literacy is a pedagogy dominated by lessons and activities aimed at developing cognitive skills and abilities.

The third and final layer of emphasis revealed within the matrix shows how instructional approaches and learning styles interact. The number of references within the two intersecting cells

means that data were coded at both planes simultaneously and thereby shading in the matrix indicates density of coding: The darker the shade, the higher incidences of coding between the two categories combined in each cell. As Table 2 show, the darkest hue is where the factual and cognitive categories meet. This means that instruction on how to analyze the veracity of information rests heavily on the development of cognitive skills. Further exploration of these findings is organized below by instructional approach.

Ideological Analysis

There was little evidence in news literacy of lessons on structural forces and biases that shape news production. Rather, news literacy instructors argued that bias was more of an audience problem. According to lecture materials, bias is defined as a "predisposition that distorts *your* ability to fairly weigh the evidence and prevents *you* from reaching a fair or accurate judgment." The definition demonstrates that the news literacy view on bias is that it is primarily the product of individual consumption and interpretation habits. This stance is in sharp contrast to critical media literacy pedagogues who contend that corporate forces and seemingly objective production practices cause news workers to self-censor and favor commercial interests over engaged debate on substantive issues (Kellner and Share 2007).

There were, however, some examples of ideological analysis in the unofficial news literacy curriculum, which included those resources and ideas individual instructors brought to their recitations that fell outside of standardized lesson plans. Recitations are smaller, discussion-based classes that provide instructional time and space for students to explore ideas raised in the preceding lecture. Because the recitations were so heavily dependent on dialogue, observations revealed that there was a significant degree of freedom to explore critical approaches, if instructors chose to do so. The news fellows in particular, all of whom were graduate students at the PhD level, took advantage of this freedom. For example, Richard, who had worked in the news fellow program for several years, incorporated ideas from Bagdikian's (2004) critique of news media ownership into his recitations. Richard believed that the lack of ideological analysis in news literacy was a weakness of the curriculum. Jason, another news fellow pursuing a PhD in sociology, also raised concerns about the lack of critical perspectives but stated that he understood the time and space constraints inherent in all freshman-level classes: "In my discipline we would talk about ownership, but this is certainly not how my discipline would approach news, so it's unfair to use the standards of what I would ideally like to teach."

Autobiographical Analysis

News literacy was a highly personal pedagogy for both instructors and students. On one level, news literacy tapped into the professional autobiographies of instructors. On another level, it was designed to reflect how students thought about news and incorporated it into their daily lives. Therefore, any data that suggested an emphasis on personal experiences, interpretations, and habits were coded at the autobiographical node. The results of the analytic matrix query suggest that autobiographical analysis was a significant part of the instructional strategy.

For the news literacy instructors, journalism was their chosen profession. All of the lecturers interviewed articulated a belief that good journalism was good for democracy—good meaning independent, verified, and accountable. This archetype of journalism is most pronounced in the Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods, which differentiates news from entertainment, promotion, propaganda, and raw information. According to the framework, the intent of journalism, from the

perspectives of the journalists who created news literacy at Stony Brook, is to inform, and the methods of journalism include verification, independence, and accountability.

Julia Mead, a news literacy lecturer and regular contributor of science stories to *The New York Times*, said that she often raises the issue of the public service mission of the press in her classes: "I do talk about journalists being really idealistic people. We really do believe in the public service element of what we do, the public's right to know, the First Amendment." Jeff, a full-time newspaper reporter and part-time news literacy recitation instructor, said he often tells students about the stories he was working on just before class: "I might tell the class that as I was reporting yesterday an issue popped up regarding a source who was reluctant to talk to me. I would then tell them what obstacles I had to go around in order to get the information I was looking for." Jeff added that it was "second nature" for him to include his reporting experiences.

Students responded well to these personal stories. Allison, a computer science major, commented, "I can respect my professor more and listen to what he has to say more because he actually has experience in the field." Shannon, a health sciences student, thought the in-the-trenches experiences strengthened the course because "You get to know opinions on certain insider things. The fact that the recitation teachers have or are writing in newspapers [means] they have personal and professional experiences to back up what they're saying."

Production Elements Analysis

Data were coded at the production element node if they encouraged analysis of the stylistic elements of news accounts. These included editing and composition in text-based journalism, and editing, composition, point of view, angle, pacing, graphics, and sound in visual pieces. Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan (1999) note that production element cues are similar to grammar in print because they represent the mechanics of how media texts were created to construct and communicate meaning. As such, production element analysis of news included examination of word choice, point of view, connotation, arrangement of information in stories, arrangement of stories in a newspaper or news broadcast, and language.

One of the most prominent examples of the production element approach in news literacy was the Opinion Journalism unit, which posited that the difference between news reporting and editorial writing is found in language, labeling, and location. News literacy students were told that opinion journalism has its own real estate in a newspaper or on a news website, it is clearly marked, and its language landmarks include first-person statements, exaggeration or superlatives, emotional or dramatic descriptions, and the use of tone demonstrated by sarcasm, irony, or parody. Lecturer James Klurfeld, a long-time colleague of Schneider's at *Newsday*, emphasized to students that opinion journalism is a privilege for journalists that is to be honored and used responsibly: "I feel very strongly that when you're given the ability to write opinion [in journalism] that it's a higher calling. It's a license. We're going to allow you to express your opinion, but the basic rules of journalism still have to apply. You have to verify your facts; you have to be independent."

The second significant example of production element instruction is illuminated in the "Deconstruction Guide." The guide suggests that students can determine the reliability and credibility of news stories by going through a series of eight steps:

(1) Summarize the main points of a news story
(2) Assess the evidence supporting the main points; and then ask:
(3) How close does the reporter come to "opening the freezer"?[4]

(4) Are the sources reliable?
(5) Does the reporter make his or her work transparent?
(6) Does the reporter place the story in context?
(7) Are the key questions answered—Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
(8) Is the story fair?

All of the lecturers, recitation instructors, and news fellows agreed that breaking journalism into segments allowed students to see the elements that made up a well-sourced news story or opinion piece. News fellow Jason, for example, stated that the analytic tools provided were what made news literacy distinct from other ways to think and teach about the news: "It's going to be different than a professional philosopher teaching an intro-to-philosophy course, asking students to talk about the news. Journalists have their own standards and practices, but I don't think many people know them."

Factual Analysis

According to the results of matrix query, factual analysis instruction and activities accounted for close to 50% of all of the data coded along the learning continua, with the majority intersecting at the cognitive domain. News literacy pedagogy posits that the discipline of verification in journalism it at the heart of news and thereby requires journalists to gather, assess, and weigh information, add meaning to facts through context, seek enough information to make a story balanced and fair, and explain how they came to learn the facts and, when appropriate, what they didn't know. In this light, news literacy instruction at Stony Brook is designed to provide students with analytic tools aimed at identifying and evaluating the markers of verified, independent, and accountable journalism that is based on facts.

Stony Brook President Shirley Strum Kenny described the intent of news literacy when she remarked, "In order to protect our democracy, we must prepare students to read intelligently, apply logic, and eye public communications skeptically, with an eye for the lie." Center for News Literacy director Dean Miller referred to journalists as "honest brokers." One interviewee summed up the journalistic mindset when he described journalism as a "fact-finding methodology."

Therefore, if there was a problem with the facts in a news story, there was a problem with the journalism that created it. Full-time news literacy lecturer and former *60 Minutes* producer Steven Reiner commented that the techniques found in the deconstruction guide outline the steps students should take when they want to assess the accuracy and utility of news: "What we're talking about is how to recognize good journalism and, for lack of a better description, bad journalism—to know why something is bad journalism and why something is good journalism. And [students] need to demand good [fact-based] journalism."

Students found the emphasis on facts advantageous. Many stated that the news literacy class was the first time someone had taught them how to assess the authenticity of information. Allison, a computer science student, said that the lack of a framework to evaluate news sources made her doubt herself just as much, if not more, than the news media she encountered: "In the past, I was concerned: Is this right? How am I supposed to know? Nowhere else do you ever talk about how true the information you're getting is or definitely how to determine if it is factual or not." Jacob, an undeclared freshman, also reported that he became more comfortable critiquing news as a result of his news literacy work. He admitted that he was already skeptical of news sources previous to his enrollment in the course, but felt that the pedagogy offered him tools to be more precise: "Before the only criticism I could bring was that doesn't sound right. But this [course] really helps you pick stories apart. News literacy shows you why the facts might not be right or why they were presented even though they might have been faulty."

Discussion, Implications, and Future Directions

This project sought to situate the Stony Brook news literacy program in media literacy education through the formulation and application of an analytic framework that combined various ways people approach the instruction of media literacy with multiple ways people derive meaning from media messages. The study finds that the journalists-turned-educators behind the Stony Brook approach to news literacy based their instruction on more than two centuries of American press traditions—traditions that emphasize verification, independence, and accountability. Given the importance of facts for individual journalists (see Altschull 1990; Christians et al. 2009; Schudson 2008; Overholser and Hall Jamieson 2005; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007), it is understandable that a course designed and taught by journalists about journalism would focus on teaching students how to assess the veracity of information.

With a better understanding of the motivations and preferences of the journalists who created and taught news literacy in addition to the clear bias towards cognitive processing of news messages revealed in the matrix analysis, a cognitive theory of news literacy is proposed. The model, which is based on Potter's (2004) cognitive theory of media literacy, specifies the preferred mental processes at work in the examination of news according to Stony Brook instructional practices. Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between the intended information processing skills and journalistic disciplinary knowledge communicated through the Taxonomy of Information Neighborhoods, news driver framework, and deconstruction guide:

Figure 1
Cognitive Model of the Stony Brook Approach to News Literacy
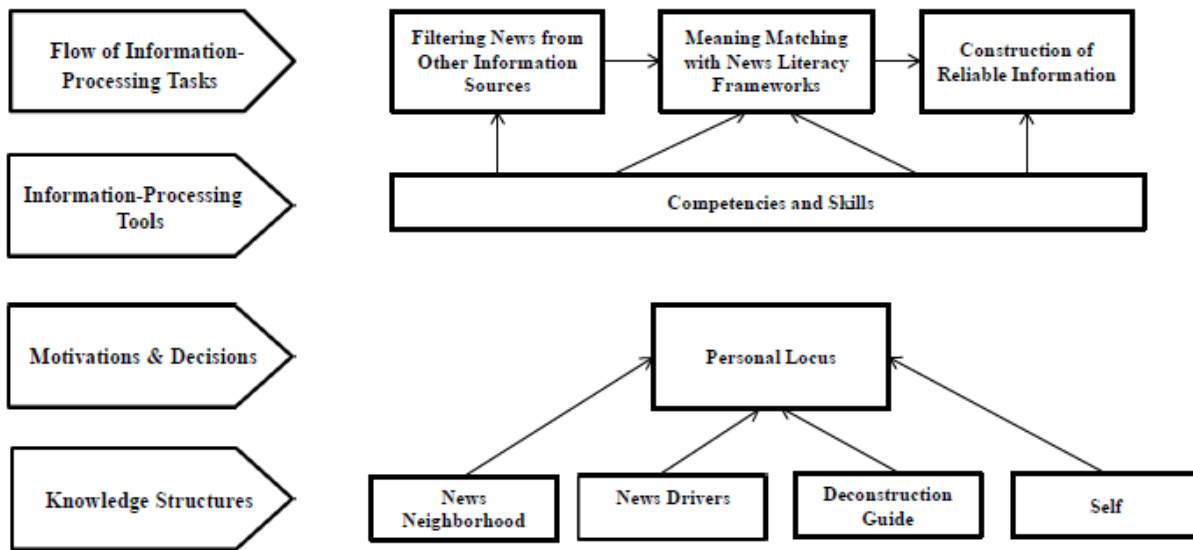
Adapted from Potter (2004), Cognitive Model of Media Literacy (p. 68)

News literacy instructors thought it was important for students to recognize journalism and separate it from other information sources. What made journalism different according to the "news neighborhood" taxonomy was a commitment to independence, verification, and accountability. The next knowledge structure is the list of so-called "news drivers." News drivers such as importance, relevance, prominence, and proximity are meant to teach students why certain news stories are given time, space, and attention in news media while others are ignored. The deconstruction guide is viewed as the pinnacle in the course because it integrates the majority of news literacy lessons into one analytic tool. The model's final category of knowledge is the self, or what Potter (2008) calls the personal locus, which refers to personal interpretation habits, biases, and consumption patterns. Howard Schneider echoes Potter's reasoning that the more mindful people are about processing information, the more they can control the meaning-making process when he described the overall philosophy of news literacy at Stony Brook. As he explained, "The success or failure of this course is not based on whether students consume more news. It would be ideally, and I want them to do this, it's in their self-interest; however, the key thing is whether when they go to the news, they can discriminate."

How a student is taught to discriminate or analyze or deconstruct a mediated message is at the heart of this inquiry. This study is not concerned with measuring news literacy knowledge or skills as per recent news literacy research (Maksl, Ashley, and Craft 2015; Ashley, Maksl, and Craft 2013), but rather it has aimed to assess the pedagogy—the theory of teaching and learning—of an established news literacy curriculum through a multiperspectival and multidimensional analytic lens. The deeper, more nuanced understandings of the Stony Brook approach to news literacy brought to light in the study could be used by educators to alter emphasis or address conceptual blind spots such as the lack of ideological awareness raised by Hobbs (2010b, 2011b) and confirmed in the matrix query. The results of this study could also lead to changes to lessons, activities, and associated assessment programs so they are more in line with the intentions of the educators who teach the course.

For example, there is minimal evidence of formal civics instruction in the Stony Brook curriculum, even though the course is positioned as a citizenship enhancing pedagogy (Schneider 2007; Miller 2011). The connection between news literacy participation and political engagement is never fully developed because the educators rely heavily on their experiences as journalists and on current events (Fleming 2014). The use of "fresh" news stories proves useful in explaining journalistic decision-making, analyzing news texts, and making course concepts relevant to students, but the relationship between prominent, attention-getting stories that tend to dominate 24/7 news cycles in the digital age and therefore news literacy lectures and discussions–stories such as 33 trapped miners in Chile in fall 2010 when data were collected, or the Boston Marathon bombings in spring 2013, or the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in spring 2014 — offer little direction and arguably little inspiration to increase civic awareness or engagement in students. In other words, one of the guiding theories of news literacy at Stony Brook does not seem to match the instructional practice and curricular emphasis.

Instead, the goal to teach students to look at information with the skepticism of a seasoned journalist is a more realistic and accurate outcome when instructional emphasis is explored. The skills and abilities identified to help students become discriminating information-processors mirrors Potter's (2004) seven skills of media literacy, only the news literacy information-processing skills are grounded in journalistic perspectives embedded in curricular materials. These skills include analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, and synthesis. Descriptions of each of these information-processing tasks in relation to knowledge structures outlined in the cognitive theory of news literacy are provided in Table 3.

Table 3
Skills of News Literacy

Skill	Task
Analysis	Breaking down a news story whether is it in print, on television, or online into meaningful elements using tools and techniques designed to assess the veracity and reliability of information presented.
Evaluation	Judging the value of verification, independence, and accountability elements in news accounts; the judgments are made by comparing them to the other types of information sources in the Information Neighborhood framework.
Grouping	Determining how different genres of news such as opinion journalism, cable news, talk radio, and blogs are similar in function, purpose, and presentation; determining how different genres of news such as opinion journalism, cable news, talk radio and blogs vary in function, purpose and presentation.
Induction	Inferring a pattern across news consumption and interpretation habits based on the functions of news framework, then generalizing the pattern across other news consumer populations.
Deduction	Using general principles about journalism as identified in the news neighborhood, news driver, and deconstruction frameworks to explain the particulars of news accounts.
Synthesis	Assembling elements of news accounts into brief reports while applying literacy principles.

Adapted from Potter's (2004), "The Seven Skills of Media Literacy" (p. 124)

Potter (2004) views information as "piecemeal and transitory," whereas he describes knowledge as "structured, organized, and of more enduring significance" (p. 52). Along these lines, this study illuminates the structure of Stony Brook news literacy knowledge and its relationship to cognitive skill development. Thereby, the understandings expressed through the matrix, the cognitive theory of news literacy, and the list of information-processing skills address to some degree Potter's (2010) concern that MLE lacks specificity. In addition, the matrix as a curricular assessment instrument builds on the idea that media literacy as an educational theory, teaching tactic, and cognitive ability is multidisciplinary. This echoes the attempt to align the growing number of disciplines attracted to MLE (RobbGrieco and Hobbs, 2013), the formulation of policy action plans for digital and media literacy (Hobbs, 2010), attempts to synthesize computer, network, technology, information, visual, and media literacies (Tyner, 1998) and the belief that MLE needs to resist adopting a reductive or mechanistic approach to assessing media literacy because groups develop and require different forms of media literacy to address their unique needs and disciplinary standpoints (Buckingham et al, 2005).

Researchers looking at media literacy curricula in the future could add or subtract approaches and learning dimensions to the matrix based on the knowledge and desired outcomes educators bring to the field. In the case of news literacy, journalistic knowledge was the dominant perspective shaping instruction; thereby a factual analysis category was created and used as means to understand what was going on in news literacy classrooms within and ultimately beyond the parameters of more established

MLE viewpoints. Another MLE learning outcome absent from the Stony Brook curriculum and Silverblatt, Ferry, and Finan's (1999) synthesis of approaches to media literacy instruction is content creation (Aufderheide 1993; Hobbs 2010a, 1998a). A *creation* category could easily be added to the matrix as a way to explore emphasis in a MLE program that includes instruction on media production, such as the one put forth by Melki (2012) that seeks to integrate multimedia production *and* social science research skills into MLE.

It is an often cited axiom in MLE that lessons are more impactful and relevant if they reflect student media interests and habits because students already bring to MLE classrooms a great deal of prior experience with media (Potter 2008; Tyner 1998; Hobbs 2010a, 2011a; Mihailidis 2014, 2012). The same philosophy applies to the increasing number of educators and researchers attracted to MLE. They already bring to MLE a wealth of knowledge about and experience with media, often grounded in the principles and practices of their respective disciplines. This study offers a multidimensional framework to examine instructional emphasis in a specialized, topic-driven MLE curriculum, such as the Stony Brook news literacy model, and to explore how instructional emphasis complements and challenges other MLE approaches.

By using a systematic research design and developing multiple analytic explanations made possible through the lens of the MLE matrix, this study reveals a more comprehensive picture of the Stony Brook approach to news literacy. Through the analysis, its choices, consistencies, contradictions, and opportunities are revealed. The findings resulting from this study, however, cannot be generalized to other news literacy programs. In addition, the study could have been strengthened by assessment of the effects of news literacy instruction. Ultimately, the understandings of the Stony Brook approach and the framework conceptualized to examine it pave the way for further theory development as well as more refined lesson plans, assessment tools, and research programs that better match the differing motivations and backgrounds of educators and researchers who make up the dynamic, diverse, and growing MLE community.

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[1] Organizations that contributed funds to support news literacy development, instruction, and/or expansion include: John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, $1.75 million; Robert R. McCormick Foundation, $530,000; John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, $285,000; Ford Foundation, $385,000; Atlantic Philanthropies, $25,000; and, Laurence W. Levine Foundation, $50,000.

[2] Maintaining confidentiality through the assignment of pseudonyms is the norm in qualitative research in education. However, Simons (2009) argues that anonymization is not the most appropriate procedure to adopt in studies that examine a program that is unique or programs that include high-profile individuals. News literacy at Stony Brook satisfied both of these

non-anonymization conditions, so two informed consent forms were created: One assured confidentiality; the other stated that informants would be identified in research reports and presentations.

[3] The Stony Brook general education program is known as the Diversified Education Curriculum and its various requirements are often referred to as "DECs." The news literacy course was permitted to satisfy two DEC categories. Students enrolled in "JRN 101-B: News Literacy" satisfied DEC B requirements. DEC B courses facilitate the development of critical interpretation and analytical skills. Students registered in "JRN 103-G: News Literacy" earned DEC G credits. DEC G offerings teach about methods and disciplines in the humanities. The double DEC designation made news literacy attractive to non-journalism majors and thus played a significant role in attracting the large number of students needed to satisfy the Knight Foundation's 10,000 student grant stipulation.

[4] "Open the freezer" refers to a cautionary tale about failing to verify facts told by Brian Thevenot of *The Times-Picayune*. Thevenot (2005a) got the facts wrong when he reported that bodies were piled on top of each other in the freezer of a New Orleans convention center where people sought refuge from Hurricane Katrina. Thevenot (2005b) admitted that one of the reasons for the mistake was that he relied on second-hand information from National Guardsmen standing outside the freezer who told him there were bodies inside. What he failed to do was open the freezer to see the bodies himself and thereby verify what the guardsmen had asserted. "Open the freezer" subsequently became an instructional reminder of the value of verification in the search for reliable information.