Media Literacy Education: a Case Study of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NEW MEXICO MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

by

Sam Nkana

Chair: Larry D. Burton
Title: MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NEW MEXICO MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

Name of researcher: Sam Nkana

Name and degree of faculty chair: Larry D. Burton, Ph.D.

Date completed: June 2010

Problem

England and Australia are the frontrunners in the establishment of media literacy education in schools, providing performance and content standards, norm-referenced tests, and pre-service university training for a specialty in media education. Canada is also in the advanced stage in the development of a media literacy curriculum. The United States, although a major producer of media, lags behind these countries in preparing its teachers and students to understand the media. Although national education standards and the curricular frameworks of all 50 states now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media literacy education, only a handful of schools teach media literacy.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the history and background of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project (NMMLP), an established media literacy organization. In addition, this study aimed to explore the processes and techniques adopted by this organization in training individuals to implement principles of media literacy in various settings.

Method

This qualitative case study design sought to document a media literacy program in the United States. The study investigated its curricular materials, instructional practices, and training methods for teaching media literacy. NMMLP was chosen as the organization to be studied.

Results

Six key themes connected to the research questions were derived from the data. These were: (a) change, (b) critical thinking, (c) role play, (d) training model, (e) relevance, and (f) networking. The inception of NMMLP came as a result of one person’s dream to fight the media’s hegemony over individuals’ lives and bring about change. One of the core principles taught by NMMLP as an agent of change was to develop critical thinking skills in its trainees. Role play, training models, relevance, and networking were found to have contributed to the success of its training programs.

Conclusions

I discovered that the practices of NMMLP confirmed statements made during the interviews. The staff indicated that NMMLP stays abreast of current issues concerning
individuals or groups within our society. For example, because of the focus of electronic and written media on body image and because society continues to emphasize the ‘need’ for women to be thin, NMMLP produced a DVD-ROM called *Media and Body Image*, which points out the media’s influence on society’s perception of the ideal body image. Visiting this organization allowed me to see how it trains individuals as well as how it responds to matters affecting our society.

I found a common thread in NMMLP that has sustained it from the time Dee Dee Downs started the organization to the present—networking. Networking has been its lifeline. NMMLP implements best practices as delineated in the *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States* formulated by the National Association for Media Literacy Education. Its work also follows guidelines suggested by many media literacy education scholars.
MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NEW MEXICO MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Sam Nkana
June 2010
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Without my wife’s support and encouragement, without her constant reminder that I have a goal to meet, I would not have fulfilled this dream. To her, I dedicate this work.
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Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:20-21)
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The idea that media play a significant role in the United States has been an accepted fact for decades. More so now than ever before, media are penetrating cultures and inundating people with a gamut of information at an ever-accelerating pace. In his preface to the book, *Rethinking Media Literacy: A Critical Pedagogy of Representation* (1995), Douglas Kellner states:

> A media culture has emerged in which sounds, and spectacles which help produce the fabric of our everyday life [sic]. Radio, television, film, and the other products of the cultural industries provide the materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood, our notion of what it means to be male or female, of sexuality, our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of “us” and “them.” Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. (p. xiii)

According to a survey by Penn, Schoen, & Berland Associates, and American Viewpoint for Common Sense Media (as cited in Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003b), approximately 9 out of 10 parents in America believe that today’s media play a major role in children becoming too materialistic (90%), using more coarse and vulgar language (90%), engaging in sexual activity at younger ages (89%), experiencing a loss of innocence too early (88%), and behaving in violent or anti-social ways (85%).
In comparing the perceptions of the negative influence the media has on children, this survey (Common Sense Media, as cited in Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003b) found that 37% of parents cite television as having the most negative impact, followed by video games (19%) and music (17%). It also discovered that 47% of parents believe that viewing violence and sex on TV contributes “a lot” to children adopting violent behavior and that 48% believe it contributes to their becoming involved in early sexual relationships. Despite these opinions regarding media influence on their children, most parents provide a media-rich environment for their children with little or no supervision. In another poll that Common Sense Media conducted (as cited in Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003b), 4 in 10 children (42%) live in a home where the TV set is on even when no one is watching. More than 58% live in a home where the TV is on during mealtimes. The poll also reveals that 65% of children age 8 and older have TV in their bedroom, 45% have a video game player there, and 36% have a VCR.

The media certainly play a major role in the lives of Americans. “Only 59 percent of adults talk with other family members during the course of an evening” (Schwartz, 1990, p. 12). When it comes to parents spending time with their children during the evening, Schwartz (1990) notes that only 34% do.

According to Thoman (1993), there are 162 million TV sets on for a duration of 7 hours a day (p. 1). When children 4 to 6 years old were asked in a survey, “Which do you like better, TV or your daddy?,” 54% said “TV” (Silverblatt, 2001, p. 4).

The Kaiser Family Foundation report, “Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds” (2010), states that “eight-to-eighteen-year-olds spend more time with media than in any other activity . . . an average of more than 7½ hours a day, seven days
a week” (p. 1). Given that young people may use multiple forms of media simultaneously, the study notes that “today’s youth pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of content into those daily 7½ hours—an increase of almost 2¼ hours of media exposure per day over the past five years” (p. 2). Television content once consumed while sitting in front of a TV is now available on laptops, cell phones, and iPods as well (p. 2).

These data underscore the conclusion that “understanding the role of media in young people’s lives is essential for those concerned about promoting the healthy development of children and adolescents, including parents, pediatricians, policymakers, children’s advocates, educators, and public groups” (Kaiser, 2010, p. 1). With this increased exposure to the media, it would seem imperative that educators take a closer look at the media texts being consumed.

Kellner (1995) points out the need for students as well as all members of society to be critical media consumers by learning to “more actively create their own meanings, and lives, and society” (p. xv). He distinguishes critical media literacy from both “functional literacy,” which is defined as the “acquisition of the rudimentary skills of reading and writing,” and “cultural literacy,” referred to as “the acquisition of basic knowledge concerning one’s culture, society, and polity” (p. xiv). He states that critical media literacy “refers to the gaining of skills necessary to analyze and critically dissect all forms of culture with which individuals interact, ranging from books to the artifacts of film, television, radio, and the other products of the cultural industries” (pp. xiv-xv).

Addressing the damaging and unsuitable experiences young people encounter as they are exposed to the media, David Buckingham (2003) offers the following, “Most
obviously, it would seem to reinforce the urgent need for systematic programmes of
teaching and learning about the media” (p. 32). Buckingham argues:

Ultimately, my analysis suggests that there is a widening gap between children’s
worlds outside school and the emphases of many education systems. While the social
and cultural experiences of children have been dramatically transformed over the past
fifty years, schools have signally failed to keep pace with change. (p. 32)

Buckingham (2003) adds that today’s classrooms would be recognizable to the
are organized, the kinds of skills and knowledge that are valued in assessment, and a
good deal of the actual curriculum content, have changed only superficially since that
time” (pp. 32-33).

Buckingham (2003) argues that, despite the growing significance of media and
the urgency to establish media education, progress has been “slow and uneven” (p. 102).
One of the problems Buckingham cites in even the most progressive media literacy
programs is that “it tends to take the form of an elective or optional area of the secondary
school curriculum rather than a compulsory element” (p. 102). The development of
media education is largely relegated to teachers who often receive no assistance, and
worse yet, receive no training for the area of media education they are assigned. He
states:

We can point to the relative--and in some instances increasing—conservatism of
education systems; the continuing resistance to regarding popular culture as worthy of
serious study; and the potentially threatening nature of the kinds of ‘critical thinking’
that are inherent in media education. (p. 102)

Ellen Krueger and Mary T. Christel (2001) echo similar thoughts regarding
teacher-readiness to teach media literacy in schools. They state: “By and large,

English/language arts teachers have little or no formal training in the formal analysis of
media texts as compared with our training in literature and composition” (p. x). Although Krueger and Christel believe that techniques can be transferred from the pedagogy of reading and writing to the analysis of print and non-print media texts, they argue that “relying solely on those techniques doesn’t fully reveal the potential and artistry of film, television, advertising, or journalism” (p. x). The authors therefore encourage the need for teachers to become students of media industries to acquire the critical language to discuss, for example, film as a visual, rather than a narrative, text.

Robert Kubey and Frank Baker (1999) presented the result of their research in school curricula in the article, “Has Media Literacy Found a Curricular Foothold?” They report that for more than 40 years, both young people and adults in our society have spent the majority of their leisure time in contact with the electronic mass media. But quite a number of schools still operate as “if the only forms of expression worthy of study are poem, the short story, and the novel” (p. 38). Though their report shows that almost all 50 state curricular frameworks now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media education, their informal survey of graduate schools of education shows “all too many of them concluding that it is adequate to train future teachers to thread a 16mm projector or show students a film version of Great Expectations.” Few instruct future teachers how to have students complete assignments using multimedia. Worse yet, they found that educational institutions are often mystified about how to retrain teachers to educate future citizens concerning the realities of the new media.

Robert Kubey (1998), in his article “Obstacles to the Development of Media Education in the United States,” presents additional issues that have hindered the advancement of media literacy in the United States. One of these factors is the fact that
the 50 states are spread across 3.6 million square miles, each having a different educational authority and each with many local school boards, resulting in the isolation of media educators. Kubey believes that media education does not receive much support in this country. He points out that “more parents, for example, will say they want their children to be computer literate than will say they want their children to be media literate” (p. 60).

Kubey (1998) emphasizes that teachers often arrange and pay for their own media training through private workshops. He adds that many eager would-be media literacy teachers in the United States are young, untenured, and lack power to make significant changes. Some teachers fear that their involvement in media education could earn them the label of being political. Another problem Kubey cites is that teachers wonder how just one more course is to be added to an already “burgeoning curriculum” (p. 62).

Kubey (1998) argues that “U.S. educators have also been historically less inclined to draw from the experiences of teachers in other countries or to know about foreign intellectual developments in media studies” (p. 63). Despite the obstacles hindering the progress of media education in the United States, Kubey notes “that media education is truly gaining energy and support around the U.S.” (p. 67). Though obstacles are still present, he believes their identification is the first step in surmounting them.

Statement of the Problem

Silverblatt (2001) states that England and Australia are the front-runners in the establishment of media education in schools, providing performance and content standards, norm-referenced tests, and pre-service university training for a specialty in media education. Canada also has an advanced media literacy curriculum. The province
of Ontario, for instance, has had a media education requirement for students in Grades 7 through 12 since 1987 (p. 8).

Silverblatt (2001) points out that media literacy education is an established field of study within the international academic arena. Most industrialized nations have embraced media literacy education. Countries such as Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Chile, India, Scotland, South Africa, France, Italy, Spain, and Jordan have made significant advances in the field of media education (p. 8). It is rather ironic that the United States, as a major producer of media, lags behind when it comes to preparing its teachers and students to understand this new phenomenon. Although the national standards and all 50 state curricular frameworks now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media literacy education, few schools teach media literacy (Silverblatt, 2001, p. 8).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe the history and background of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, an established media literacy organization. In addition, this study aims to explore the processes and techniques adopted by this organization in training individuals to implement principles of media literacy in various settings.

**Research Questions**

The following questions were formulated to guide this research. All questions were framed in the context of the sampled media literacy program.

1. What is the New Mexico Media Literacy Project? What is the story behind its development?
2. What processes does this organization employ in its training program?

3. What instructional practices do the trainers use in their presentations?

4. What curriculum materials does this organization utilize in its training? How does this organization select and produce materials for its training?

**General Methodology**

This study used a descriptive, qualitative case study method. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documents to chronicle the processes NMMLP uses in its training programs. After participants completed and signed the consent forms, the interviews were then recorded electronically, after which transcription was done verbatim. Data analysis was done by coding for emergent themes that arose from the interviews. Themes were then grouped into categories.

**Significance**

This qualitative case study on the NMMLP training program is significant in several ways. It will help educators understand that with the ascendancy of new technology in our society, there is a need to embrace media literacy and to include media education in the curriculum. This study will provide new sources of information to assist those who plan to pursue training in the field of media education. This study will bring awareness to schools, churches, youth groups, etc., of the existence of media literacy programs in the United States. In addition, those interested in starting media literacy training programs will be informed on how to possibly proceed. Furthermore, this study will help bring awareness to its readers of the existence of media literacy organizations whose goal is to teach people how to evaluate their media choices and understand the
The study also contributes to the body of literature providing an overview of the media literacy process in today’s technological world.

**Rationale**

The media, without a doubt, are ubiquitous and unavoidable in today’s society. As David Buckingham (2003) points out, “The media are undoubtedly the major contemporary means of cultural expression and communication: to become an active participant in public life necessarily involves making use of the modern media” (p. 5). He argues that the media have now replaced the family, the church, and the school as the major socializing influence in contemporary society. Buckingham also alludes to the fact that the media to a great extent are “embedded in the textures and routines of everyday life, and they provide many of the ‘symbolic resources’ we use to conduct and interpret our relationships and to define our identities” (p. 5).

Douglas Kellner (1995) states that the media have been embraced by most people as sources of information and realistic representation of cultural pedagogy. Ted Baehr (1998) expresses concerns about the effects of the media on our society. He states:

> Our families, and especially our youth, are being corrupted and destroyed by the powerful transformational influences of the mass media of entertainment. Even our churches have been unable to give their members, especially their youths, help in dealing with the emotive images and idols of our entertainment culture. (p. 11)

Continuing, he writes:

> Many churches are clueless about the extent of the problem in their congregations, while other churches have opted for anything goes. As a result, the children have suffered, and the parents are confused and often clueless as to how to deal with the problem. (p. 11)
Moreover, Baehr (1998) notes that parents are not able to control what is exposed to their children and do not know the extent to which these messages are affecting them or how to help them (p. 11).

In light of the influence of the media upon our society, Buckingham (2003) urges the implementation of media education in schools and making the curriculum relevant to children’s lives outside school. Douglas Kellner (1995) supports this viewpoint. He states, “We are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society, and thus it is important to learn how to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages” (p. xiii).

The classroom is the ultimate setting of formal education in our society. Therefore, it would seem to be the logical venue for teaching media literacy. However, teaching media in the classroom requires a well-versed teacher who sets clear objectives that align with students’ needs. Len Masterman (1997) notes that “In a successful class, teacher and students alike understand the connections which exist between this particular discussion or activity or exercise, and larger, shared objectives to which they are all committed” (p. 19).

Studying the media will help nullify the misconception that media represent reality. It is crucial for students to see media messages as a reflection of points-of-view rather than a representation of reality. Media education could help students “denaturalize” the media by challenging the “naturalness” of media images. It certainly will motivate students to question production of media messages, examine the techniques used to create the “reality-effect,” and consider how audiences “read” and respond to media content. As Masterman (1997) succinctly states:
Media education is primarily investigative. It does not seek to impose specific cultural values. It aims to increase students’ understanding of how the media represent reality. Its objective is to produce well-informed citizens who can make their own judgments on the basis of the available evidence. In so far as media education deals with value judgments, it does so in ways which encourage students to explore the range of value judgments made about a given media text and to examine the sources of such judgments (including their own) and their effects. It does not seek to impose ideas on what constitutes “good” or “bad” television, newspapers, or films. (p. 41)

**Conceptual Framework**

This study is grounded on the arguments of numerous proponents of media literacy education who believe that individuals should be taught how to read and criticize the media as well as produce alternative media and culture (Kellner, 1995; Masterman, 1985; Silverblatt, 2008). Most theorists have produced excellent reading materials—research about audiences and how they use the media and how the media affect them—but neglect the issues of critical pedagogy. “Critical media pedagogy involves teaching how to activate students and citizens so they can learn to more actively create their own meanings, lives, and society” (Kellner, 1995, p. xv). Kellner argues that since the media themselves are forms of pedagogy, critical media pedagogy should play the role of countering media pedagogy by teaching individuals how to read media texts, criticize them, and produce alternative media and culture.

Neil Postman in his classic critique of television, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), states that “Americans are the best entertained and quite likely the least well-informed people in the Western World” (p. 106). While television audiences may see television “as a window to the world [that] has made Americans exceedingly well informed” (p. 106), Postman points out the inability of viewers to interpret critically the messages presented to them.
Silverblatt’s Framework

Art Silverblatt, professor of Communication and Journalism at Webster University, St. Louis, Missouri, is a recognized authority in the field of media education. He has recently written a handbook for media literacy education, *Media Literacy: Interpreting Media Messages* (2008), which, according to Silverblatt, “offers a critical approach that enables students to better understand the information conveyed through the channels of mass communication—print, photography, film, radio, television, and digital media (p. xi).

In his handbook, Silverblatt (2008) provides a theoretical framework for the critical analysis of media text that examines four key areas: process, context, framework, and production values (pp. 19-161). Understanding the communication process is the first key to media literacy. According to Silverblatt, “communication is an active, dynamic experience that demands your fullest attention and energy” (p. 19). He underscores the significance of feedback in the communication process, stating that “listeners may ask questions or comment, in order to better understand what the communicator is trying to say” (p. 20).

Context, the second key to media literacy, is comprised of the surrounding elements that, in subtle ways, shape meaning and convey messages (p. 65). For example, Silverblatt (2008) points out that “media presentations derive their significance from the events of the day” (p. 65). This is a historical approach to media analysis which puts events and issues noted in the media into meaningful perspective.
In order to become a media literate person, an understanding of the framework of the program or article is essential. The components that make up the framework are: introduction, plot, genre, and conclusion. According to Silverblatt (2008),

The introduction often foreshadows what to expect in the course of a media presentation. The opening of a film, television, or radio program acquaints the audience with the primary characters, plot, outline, and the worldview of the programming. (p. 135)

The plot is a series of actions that builds upon one another and includes an introduction, the body, and conclusion. In the plot, characters are initially confronted with a dilemma that is usually resolved by the end of the story. Genre is defined as the category of programming, for example, horror, situation comedy, western, etc. The conclusion is derived following the resolution of the dilemma. Silverblatt observes that conclusions to popular media presentations are often false, confused, or simply illogical when considered within the flow of the program. Therefore, the audience must come to its own conclusions rather than be bound by that of the producer. The conclusion, according to Fowles (as cited in Silverblatt, 2008), should be a logical extension of the initial premise, characters, and worldview, free of further intrusion by the artist. “An author creates the characters, setting, and worldview of the novel but then must let go, allowing the characters to fulfill their destinies” (Fowles, 1969, as cited in Silverblatt, 2008, pp. 154-155).

Production values, the fourth key to media literacy, impact the “style” and “quality” of the media presentation. Like grammar in print media, production values influence the way the audience receives the message, the emphasis or interpretation the media communicator places on the information transmitted, and the reaction of the
audience to the information. According to Silverblatt (2008), the production values incorporated in the media “engage the audience in the media experience” (p. 111).

Masterman

Len Masterman, pioneering media educator in England and author of the seminal text, *Teaching the Media* (1985), has delineated 18 principles of media education (1995). He asserts that media education can empower students and strengthen “society’s democratic structure.” According to Masterman (1995), the “central unifying concept of media education is that of representation,” that is, the media do not reflect reality, but represent it. Media are symbolic or sign systems, and elimination of this understanding disables the intent of media education.

Masterman (1995) points out that “media education is essentially active and participatory, fostering the development of more open and democratic pedagogues.” It “encourages students to take more responsibilities for and control over their own learning, to engage in joint planning of the syllabus.” He continues:

Underpinning media education is a distinctive epistemology. Existing knowledge is not simply transmitted by teachers or ‘discovered’ by students. It is not an end but a beginning. It is the subject of critical investigation and dialogue, out of which new knowledge is actively created by students and teachers. (¶ 18)

Masterman (1985) enumerates reasons media education should be “the most urgent priority” (p. 2). He notes the high rate of media consumption and the saturation of media in our society and points out that it is not necessarily the time spent with the media that makes them significant, but that the media are shapers of our ideas and perceptions. He states that media are “consciousness industries” that not only provide information about our world, “but ways of seeing and understanding it” (pp. 3-4).
Another reason Masterman (1985) wishes to create an urgency for media literacy education is that “outside of school the most influential and widely disseminated modes of communication are visual” (p. 13). He notes that television is probably the most popular source of information in our society and often regarded by people as the most reliable source of news, perhaps for its ability to provide visual records of events. He, therefore, acknowledges the necessity for schools to help students develop the ability to critically examine visual images.

Additionally, Masterman (1985) expresses some concerns that, in spite of the “major cultural and political changes produced by the media . . ., the gap between the practices and priorities of most classrooms and the situations which pupils face in the world outside is now dangerously wider than it has ever been” (p. 14). He points out:

Every child in school today will spend most of her adult life as a citizen in the 21st century. We do not need to go back but to go ‘forward to basics,’ to developing those aptitudes and abilities which everyone will need if they are to be adequately educated for life in the next century. (p. 14)

In his view, a central purpose of media education should be to “denaturalize” the media. In other words, media education should challenge the “naturalness” of media images by questioning its production methods, examining the techniques used to create the “reality-effect,” raising questions about the ideological impact of the media’s construction of common sense, and considering how audiences “read” media content.

Criteria for Media Education

Based on the overview given above, Masterman (1997) enumerates six criteria that media education should adopt:

1. Media education is primarily investigative.
2. Media education is organized around key concepts.

3. Media education is a lifelong process.

4. Media education aims to foster not simply critical understanding but critical autonomy.

5. The effectiveness of media education may be evaluated by two principal criteria.

6. Media education is topical and opportunistic.

Media education, according to the first criterion, should not seek to impose specific cultural values on students but should help them understand how the media represent reality. Its sole objective is to produce well-informed citizens who are given opportunity to “explore the range of value judgments made about a given media text and to examine the sources of such judgments (including their own) and their effects” (Masterman, 1997, p. 41).

The second criterion delineates key concepts, or analytical tools, around which media education is organized. According to Masterman (1997), the earliest forms of media education were content-based, that is, principles, concepts, and modes of enquiry were taught. The adoption of key concepts has helped make textual investigation of any medium more systematic and rigorous. They include: “denotation and connotation, genre, selection, nonverbal communication, media language, naturalism and realism, audience, institution, construction, mediation, representation, code/encoding/decoding, audience, segmentation, narrative structure, sources, ideology, anchorage, rhetoric, discourse, and subjectivity” (pp. 41-42). Masterman reiterates that these concepts are
meant to illuminate the nature of specific media texts, rather than to be taught as abstract concepts in themselves.

Masterman (1997) believes that media education is a lifelong process according to his third criterion. It should begin, for most children, well before they attend school and continue throughout their adult lives. He notes that “[a] media education which fails to recognize the implication of this will fall short of its fullest potentiality” (p. 42). The media education experience must be fulfilling and enjoyable, encouraging students to continue its use outside the classroom. It should develop in children self-confidence and critical judgment in analyzing the media messages they encounter every day as noted in Masterman’s fourth criterion for media education.

According to Masterman (1997), media education is effective when two principle criteria are met: Students should be able to apply what they know (their critical ideas and principles) to new situations; and students should display commitment, interest, and motivation in doing so (p. 43). In addition, as noted in his sixth criterion, Masterman maintains that “media education is topical and opportunistic” and seeks “to illuminate the life-situations of the learners by harnessing the interest and enthusiasm generated by the media’s coverage of topical events” (p. 43). Media education employs the wealth of information provided by the media to dialogue with the students in the classroom. Topical issues such as elections, major sporting events, etc., can create interest, motivation, and cognitive understanding that can be applied by students to their experiences outside the classroom. “This is what makes topical issues such powerful stimuli of learning: understandings gained in the classroom will have a direct relevance to, and can genuinely illuminate, the world outside of the school” (p. 43).
Joyce and Showers’s Training Model

Many scholars support the need for young people in our society to be media literate (Buckingham, 2003; Hart, 1997; Masterman, 1985; Silverblatt, 2008; Tyner, 1998). However, successful training methods are crucial for making the classroom experience profitable. Some of these can be found in Joyce and Showers’s book, Student Achievement Through Staff Development (2002), in which they identify four key components of successful teaching.

The first component focuses on knowledge and the “exploration of theory or rationale through discussions, readings, and lectures” (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 73). The second is the demonstration or modeling of new skills in a simulated workplace, a process which facilitates understanding. The third component is practicing the skill. The authors recommend practice over a period of time ranging from 8 to 10 weeks, involving 25 trials. The fourth and final component is peer coaching, the “collaborative work of teachers to solve the problems or questions that arise during implementation. It begins during training and continues in the workplace” (p. 74). Peer coaching provides support for teachers as they attempt to master new skills.

Joyce and Showers (2002) assert that all four components are needed for transfer of new knowledge to take place. In a study of 200 Inservice Educational and Training programs for teachers (INSET) they found that, even when teachers were given an opportunity to practice new skills during the inservice, application of the skills in the classroom was sporadic. However, when the four components of theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching were implemented, teachers were more likely to transfer new skills into the new environment.
Delimitations of the Study

One media literacy organization was selected as the object of study for this research project: the New Mexico Media Literacy Project in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This organization was selected because it met all the selection criteria set forth in this study. These criteria included the following:

1. The organization must have an active media literacy training program.
2. It must have a well-established website that promotes media literacy education.
3. Organization must have been established for at least 10 years.
4. Organization should emphasize most of the media literacy education guidelines as outlined by Alliance for Media Literate America (now known as NAMLE). These guidelines include:

   a. Fostering active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create
   b. Expanding the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media
   c. Building and reinforcing skills—necessitating integrated, interactive, and repeated practice—for learners of all ages
   d. Developing informed, reflective, and engaged participants essential for a democratic society
   e. Recognizing that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization
f. Affirming that people use their individual skills, beliefs, and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

5. Organization must constantly be adjusting its strategies to stay abreast with the ever-changing dynamics of the media society.

6. Organization needs to have a well-established curriculum that spells out its objectives.

**Brief Introduction to NMMLP**

NMMLP, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was started in 1993 by TV broadcaster Hugh Downs and his daughter, Deirdre Downs, to help individuals become media literate. Deirdre had been concerned about the effects the media had on society and felt it was necessary to begin a media literacy project beginning in the state of New Mexico. This was accomplished with the help of Hugh’s influence. A section of Albuquerque Academy, a secondary school facility in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was secured with the assistance of Bob McCannon, its history teacher at the time, to house the fledgling organization.

Since its inception, the scope and influence of this organization has grown so that it is now financially supported by the state of New Mexico. Also, it now provides services for other organizations throughout the 50 states. NMMLP is a member of the National Association for Media Literacy Education.

In 2004 I discovered NMMLP through reading Silverblatt’s book, *Media Literacy: Keys to Interpreting Media Messages*. This organization had sparked my interest earlier when mentioned by one of my professors. Upon realizing this was the same organization, I examined NMMLP’s website. I contacted the organization shortly
thereafter and learned about an upcoming media literacy training conference in St. Louis, Missouri, at which NMMLP would be represented. I registered and attended this conference where I was able to listen to presentations by the then director of NMMLP, Bob McCannon. His presentations gave me new insights into the subject of media literacy and the work of this organization. I learned then that NMMLP sponsors a summer training program in media literacy at its home location in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I later registered and attended the 2005 Catalyst Institute. During this training, I became keenly aware of solutions for dealing with the issues involved in media literacy. The Catalyst Institute also showed me what NMMLP had to offer. Through these experiences I felt compelled to learn more about media literacy education and its practices.

In my curiosity about this subject, I read books recommended by experts in the field including Buckingham, Postman, Silverblatt, Kellner, Hobbs, and others. Their writings revealed the problems I have highlighted in this study. I then began to wonder about possible solutions. My curiosity led me to investigate other media literacy organizations such as the Media Education Foundation, the National Association for Media Literacy Education, the Center for Media Literacy, Media Education Lab, and the Media Literacy Online Project. After researching these organizations, I felt that NMMLP offered the kinds of solutions advocated by many experts in the field of media literacy and professional development.
**Definition of Terms**

**International Reading Association (IRA):** An international organization created in 1956 to improve reading instruction, facilitate dialogue on research in the field, and encourage the habit of reading.

**Media:** Collectively the various means of mass communication thought of as a whole, including television, radio, magazines, and newspapers with the people involved in their production (Plural).

**Media Education:** Media education aims to develop a broad-based competence, not just in relation to print, but also in other symbolic systems of images and sounds. Media education is, therefore, the process of teaching and learning about media.

**Media Literacy:** Media literacy is the outcome—the knowledge and skills learners acquire.

**Media Literacy Education:** The process of providing tools and skills to help individuals analyze media messages, usually in the environment of an educational institution or organization.

**Medium:** Singular of media—one medium such as television or radio.

**The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE):** A professional organization of educators in English studies, literacy, and language arts. This private, nonprofit organization is dedicated to promoting English language education at all levels, from Kindergarten through graduate studies.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides relevant background information and a review of current literature on the subject of media education. It includes the definition of media literacy, the historical development of media literacy education, theoretical debates in the field, the status of media literacy education in the United States, the need to support pedagogical change, and the efficacy of media literacy training for teachers. These six areas will give the reader a clear understanding of the developmental stages of media education worldwide, what it is, and why it should be integrated into the curricula of our schools.

Definition

Traditionally, the definition of literacy applies only to print—being able to read and write. However, with the emergence of mass communication (e.g., print, photography, film, radio, television, and even the Internet), this definition has expanded. According to Adams and Hamm (2000), Brown (1998), and Silverblatt (2001), the definition of literacy has come to include the ability to analyze competently and to utilize skillfully print journalism, film, photography, radio, television, and computer-mediated information exchange. The term for this expanded definition is now “media literacy.”
Paul Messaris (1998) defines media literacy as having knowledge about how mass media function in society. Such knowledge should encompass all aspects of the media—their economic foundations, organizational structures, and psychological effects, as well as their social consequences. In this field, a knowledge of media “language” is crucial in understanding the “representational conventions and rhetorical strategies of ads, TV programs, movies, and other forms of mass media content” (p. 70).

The National Telemedia Council (1992) defines media literacy as the “ability to choose, to understand—within the context of content, form/style, impact, industry and production—to question, to evaluate, to create and/or produce, and to respond thoughtfully to the media we consume. It is mindful viewing, reflective judgment” (p. 12).

One of the most frequently cited definitions of media literacy emerged from the 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, in Washington, DC. A report presented by Patricia Aufderheide (1997) at this conference defined the term as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. A media-literate person, therefore, is one who “can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media” (p. 79).

W. James Potter (2005) points out that the term “literacy” is usually associated with print media. Some authorities expand the term to include film and television media—visual literacy, while others associate it with computer literacy. However, Potter asserts these terms are not synonymous with media literacy. “Instead they are merely components. Media literacy includes all these specialized abilities as well as something more” (p. 22). He defines media literacy as follows:
Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. We build our perspectives from knowledge structures. To build our knowledge structures, we need tools and raw material. These tools are our skills. The raw material is information from media and from the real world. Active use means that we are aware of the messages and are consciously interacting with them. (p. 22)

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE, 2008), formerly the Alliance for a Media Literate America, defines the term in this way:

Within North America, media literacy is seen to consist of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE, and COMMUNICATE information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages. Media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. It is the skillful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages. (Definition, ¶ 1)

NAMLE (2008) asserts that, in order to become a “successful student, responsible citizen, productive worker, or competent and conscientious consumer, individuals need to develop expertise with the increasingly sophisticated information and entertainment media that address us on a multi-sensory level, affecting the way we think, feel, and behave” (A Broader Definition, ¶ 2). Today’s information and entertainment technologies communicate to individuals through a powerful combination of words, images, and sounds. Therefore, it is necessary to develop literacy skills to help interpret the messages received as well as to design and distribute one’s own media messages.

According to Renee Hobbs (1998), the term “media literacy” is used by numerous scholars and educators to refer to the process individuals use to create messages in print, audio, video, and multimedia. Brown (1998) notes in his article, “Media Literacy Perspectives,” that the traditional definition of media literacy has involved the “ability to analyze and appreciate respected works of literature and, by extension, to communicate effectively by writing well” (p. 44). However, in the last half-century it has come to
include the “ability to analyze competently and to utilize skillfully print journalism, cinematic productions, radio and television programming, and even computer-mediated information and exchange” (p. 44).

Silverblatt’s seven-part definition of media literacy (2008) forms his framework for media literacy education. The seven parts are:

1. Media literacy is a critical thinking skill that individuals apply to the source of information in order to make an informed decision.
2. Becoming media literate requires a clear understanding of the production, transmission, and context of the message produced.
3. Media literacy allows individuals to be conscious of the impact the media exert on individuals and society.
4. Media literacy allows individuals to develop strategies with which to analyze and discuss media messages in a meaningful way.
5. Media literacy enables individuals to recognize that media contents are “text” that “provides insight into our contemporary culture and ourselves.”
6. Instead of an opportunity to bash the media, media literacy should be understood as an opportunity for one to enjoy well-produced media.
7. Media literacy is a call for media producers to produce effective and responsible media messages.

Buckingham (2003), in his definition of media literacy, points out the difference between “media literacy” and “media education.” He argues that media education “aims to develop a broad-based competence, not just in relation to print. . . . It is a process of teaching about media; media literacy is the outcome—the knowledge and skills learners
Media literacy enables people to interpret and make informed judgments as consumers of media and to produce their own versions of media as well. Media education is therefore the process of teaching people how to become media literate (p. 4). Rubin (1998) concludes that “media literacy, then, is about understanding the sources and technologies of communication, the codes that are used, the messages that are produced, and the selection, interpretation, and impact of those messages” (p. 2).

Lewis and Jhally (1998) offer a different concept of media literacy. They argue that mass media should be understood as more than a collection of texts to be deconstructed and analyzed so one can distinguish or choose among them. Rather, “they should be analyzed as sets of institutions with particular social and economic structures that are neither inevitable nor irreversible” (p. 109). Furthermore, media education should not teach students only to engage media texts but also to engage and challenge media institutions.

Commenting on the many definitions of media literacy, Zettl (1998) notes that, although these “definitions” and “descriptions” seem impressive, they prove to be impractical when one attempts to put them into practice (p. 82). Moreover, helping students develop a “‘critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques’ and ‘to provide students with the ability to create media products’” in Zettl’s estimation “are Herculean tasks, even if we were to limit such pursuits to a single mass medium, such as television” (p. 82). Zettl (1998) asserts that unless guidelines, such as Silverblatt’s four major “keys” to interpreting media messages (discussed in chapter 1), are provided to help translate such goals into a workable curriculum, the definitions aforementioned will prove futile. For
until students understand the techniques used by mass media, teaching the impact of the media is almost impossible.

These broad-based definitions of media literacy, although varying in their emphases, when carefully examined contribute to an overall understanding of media contents. However, in the interest of brevity, I draw everyone’s attention to the “Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States” (NAMLE, 2007, pp. 1-8) as defined by the National Association for Media Literacy Education. These principles, I believe, summarize the key objectives of media literacy education and should be the guiding principles for the study of media contents. A list of the “Core Principles” is included in Appendix D of this document.

**Historical Development of Media Literacy Education**

This section presents a historical overview of the evolving objectives of media education and describes the rationale for studying the media today. The push for media studies dates back to the early 1930s. In the 1930s F. R. Leavis and his student Denys Thompson championed the protectionist or inoculative view that students and society must be protected from the presumed negative influence of the mass media (Leavis & Thompson, 1933, as cited in Buckingham, 2003, pp. 6-7). According to Buckingham, the central objective of Leavis and Thompson was to preserve the literary heritage, language, values, and health of the nation. The media were seen as a corrupting influence that offered superficial pleasures in place of authentic art and literature (p. 7).

Masterman (1997) describes this phase of media studies as encouraging students to “develop discrimination, fine judgment, and taste” by learning the differences between the timeless values of authentic “high culture” and “low culture,” in which mass media
was believed to fit (p. 21). This view of the media as a catalyst to cultural decline prioritized what teachers believed to be media topics worth teaching. Advertising was perceived as an important topic for discussion because it typified all that was most dangerous about the media—their manipulation of audiences, materialistic values, and destructive influence upon language. In addition to distrust of the advertising segment of the media, literary forms such as stories in women’s magazines and children’s comics came under scrutiny since their plots were often geared towards stereotypical issues (p. 22).

Educators claimed that the future of society depended upon “the simple task of analyzing an advertisement” and helping children develop the capacity to stand back from the text, reflect upon the motivations behind the procedures used, understand the ways in which the text was affecting them, and then determine what were authentic and inauthentic uses of language. Pedagogically, this inoculative approach placed the teacher in the role of protector of acceptable culture and arbiter of good taste (Masterman, 1997, p. 21).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, according to Buckingham (2003), Williams and Hoggart spearheaded a challenge to the Leavisite ideology of “inoculation” and “protectionism” (Hoggart, 1959, Williams, 1958, 1961; as cited in Buckingham, 2003). Culture was no longer viewed as a fixed set of privileged artifacts of significance—“an approved ‘canon’ of literary texts,” but as a whole way of life; and cultural expression was seen to take a variety of forms that ranged from the exalted to the everyday. This more liberal and inclusive approach began to challenge the distinctions between high culture and popular culture, as well as between art and lived experience (p. 7).
Masterman (1997) notes that the 1960s met with success as a new generation of teachers who enjoyed popular cultural forms entered the school systems. Although these teachers did not view the media as corrupting mechanisms, their objective was not to abandon protectionist approaches to media education but to modify and extend them (p. 22). The acceptance of film by educators in the 1960s set the stage for the introduction of film appreciation courses in classrooms both in Europe and North America (p. 22). However, media education continued to be “protectionist.”

When media studies were introduced in the early 1930s, the concepts of “media education” or “media literacy” as they are understood today were nonexistent. However, as television gained international significance, the 1962 International Conference on Screen Education concluded:

Because television is already a major channel of communication, and will increase in scope and power, we believe it is the responsibility of educators to teach our young people to use this medium in a constructive way. (Hodgkinson, 1964, p. 78)

Goodman (2003) states that media education in the early 1960s emphasized teaching about the media instead of through the media. Students were encouraged to develop critical attitudes toward the media, specifically toward advertising and television (p. 13). He continues:

Cultural critics such as Vance Packard (The Hidden Persuaders), Marshall McLuhan (Understanding Media, The Gutenberg Galaxy), and John Berger (Ways of Seeing) contributed to this sense, arguing for the need to move beyond the instrumental approach of using instructional medias as a didactic tool. (p. 13)

Curricula began henceforth to emphasize development of skills for analyzing television as a mass media text (p. 13).

A major turning point in the growth of media literacy in the United States occurred in 1972 when the Surgeon General’s Advisory Committee on Television and
Social Behavior linked television violence and antisocial behavior (p. 13). The following year, the Ford Foundation (1975, as cited in Goodman, 2003) issued a report on children and television stating that there was an important need for widened and improved instruction about the mass media in the public schools. We decided that literacy of young persons in regard to the mass media is the proper concern for educational instruction analogous to their concern about language literacy. (p. 31)

Thus, in the 1970s a period of transition from film studies to the study of television took place. According to Masterman (1997), “the study of television and newspapers raised quite different, and, in many ways, much more urgent problems” (p. 27).

In 1978, instigated by the Surgeon General’s report and a subsequent call for research on children and television violence, the United States Library of Congress and the United States Office of Education hosted a national conference on “Television, the Book and the Classroom” (Tyner, 1998, p. 135). As a result of that conference, there was a request for proposals to develop four major critical viewing projects in the United States aimed at elementary, secondary, and adult education. The following year, the United States Office of Education funded the following critical viewing skills (CVS) proposals: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, secondary education; WNET/Channel 13, New York, middle school education; and Boston University, a critical viewing package for adults (p. 135).

Tyner (1998) states further that Educational Testing Services (ETS) in the United States was designated to take charge of designing and conducting formative research and evaluation of the critical viewing curriculum created by Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco in the early 1980s. ETS had selected 25 reviewers, all teachers or public school administrators. At the close of the
reviewing session it was concluded that the curriculum was “of high interest to students, relevant to teaching critical viewing skills, and a good addition to courses already offered” (p. 135).

In spite of the positive rating by the reviewers, 46% of them thought that teachers would not be enthusiastic about using the curriculum, and approximately 41% thought that administrators would not consider using it in their schools. One of the administrators in the panel stated, “I believe this curriculum is not only important but necessary. . . . I’m not sure my colleagues would agree” (Tyner, 1998, p. 135).

As cited in Tyner (1998), Donna Lloyd-Kolkin, the lead researcher on the Far West project, commented that in spite of plentiful funding, high marks from reviewers, community support, and the push to train teachers, very little implementation was ever achieved (p. 135). Government funding continued, nonetheless, to support the activities that were active at the time. However, as soon as funding ran out for the projects around 1981, media activities ground to a halt in the United States (Goodman, 2003; Tyner, 1998).

Goodman (2003) points out that, in contrast to the general lack of interest in media education in the United States in the 1980s, major media development was taking place internationally. Throughout the 1980s media education continued to expand in the United Kingdom. Goodman credits the expansion to “the work of grassroots organizations such as the Association for Media Education in Scotland, the Association for Media Literacy in Canada, and the Australian Teachers of Media” (p. 14). In due time, the theoretical and practical work of the Canadians, as well as that of the British media education practitioners such as Len Masterman, David Buckingham, and Cary
Bazalgette, began to alter how media literacy functioned and was assimilated in the United States (Goodman, 2003, p. 14).

According to Goodman (2003), during the 1992 Aspen Institute Leadership Forum on Media Literacy, media literacy representatives from Canada spearheaded a new emphasis on staff development “as media literacy courses and institutes for teachers were soon offered by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Columbia University’s Teachers College, New York University, Appalachian State University in North Carolina, the New Mexico State Department of Education” (p. 14). He notes that, although a few of these programs have continued, “many were short lived” (p. 14). He also notes that this conference lacked the participation of public school teachers and administrators, which underscored the continued disconnect between media literacy education and American schools (p. 14).

It is important to note that the success of the Canadian media literacy program continued to fuel an interest in the field within the United States. The Harvard Media Literacy Institute was organized in 1993 by the Harvard University School of Graduate Studies under the direction of Renee Hobbs. Barry Duncan (1993), president of the Association for Media Literacy (AML) in Canada, was one of the teachers during the Institute. He states, “I had the privilege of helping to teach the first major Media Education Institute to be held in the United States” (¶ 1). According to Duncan (1993), the Institute attracted 85 participants from across North America, including teachers, journalists, and church leaders.

In 1986 the Ontario Ministry of Education invited 10 members of AML to prepare a Media Education Resource Guide. This guide was translated into Spanish, French,
Italian, and Japanese. With this guide in hand, AML members organized conferences in
Canada, the United States, Japan, Europe, and in Latin America to promote media
education. In 1989, according to Duncan, Pungente, and Anderson (2002),

The AML held an invitational think tank to discuss future developments of media
education in Ontario. This led to two successful international media education
conferences at the University of Guelph in 1990 and 1992. Each conference attracted
over 500 participants from around the world. (Central Canada—Quebec and Ontario,
¶ 8)

Francis Davis (1992), a media education specialist on the staff of the Center for
Media Literacy from 1989 to 1992, gives credit to AML for its contribution to the growth
of media education in the United States. He states,

The present is an exciting moment for media education in the United States. However, one non-U.S. organization deserves mention also because of its contribution to U.S. efforts: Ontario’s Association for Media Literacy (AML) is now recognized as a world leader in media education. (p. 11)

Noting the many publications AML has produced for secondary media education
since 1988, Davis (1992) states that “the AML is responsible for much of the growing
U.S. knowledge in the field, either through direct imitation or through having introduced
U.S. leaders to British and Australian educators” (p. 11).

Goodman (2003) notes that in the 1990s American efforts to promote media
literacy came mainly from such government and private agencies as the National Drug
Control Policy, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, parishes of the Catholic
church, lobby organizations for regulation of children’s TV such as the Center for Media
Education in Washington, and medical practitioners such as the American Psychological
Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics (pp. 14-15). Attempts to bring
more grassroots teacher participation to the media education field resulted in the
collaboration of the Educational Video Center with the Annenberg Institute for School
Reform to co-sponsor a national conference at Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin. The purpose of the 1995 conference was to explore how the emerging practices and principles of media education could help promote school reform efforts throughout the United States (p. 15).

Despite the effort put forth to find common ground, Goodman (2003) notes that media literacy had very little impact on the new models of education designed by the national school reform networks. Although media literacy had been advocated numerous times by educational associations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the Speech Communication Association, it failed to become a priority for most professional education associations (p. 15).

In their article, “Has Media Literacy Found a Curricular Foothold?” Kubey and Baker (1999) note Ernest L. Boyer’s definition of media literacy.

It is no longer enough simply to read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage. (p. 38)

A 1998 report in The New York Times indicated there were 12 states with media literacy curricular frameworks. However, the following year, Kubey and Baker (1999) reported that “at least 48 state curricular frameworks now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media education” (p. 38). They concluded:

The drive for improving curriculum standards, and the process of involving those who teach in writing those standards, have produced near unanimity in this country on the inclusion of elements of what many call “media-literacy education” in the state frameworks. (p. 38)

In their study they examined the curricular objectives and educational goals from available frameworks by direct query to state departments of education or via the
Internet. They noted where the media education elements in a state’s framework appeared and if such elements fell under one or more of four different categories. They found most states’ frameworks contained elements that fell under at least two of the categories. In exploring the frameworks, Kubey and Baker (1999) spotlighted some impressive elements. For example, North Carolina’s framework states:

“It is an important goal of education for learners to be able to critique and use the dominant media of today. Visual literacy is essential for survival as consumers and citizens in our technologically intensive world. Learners will appreciate various visual forms and compositions, compare and contrast visual and print information, formulate and clarify personal response to visual messages, evaluate the form and content of various visual communication. (p. 38)

West Virginia calls for students to “analyze media influence on tobacco and alcohol [use] and develop counter-advertisement for peer education” (p. 38). Kubey and Baker (1999) caution, however, that no one should interpret their enthusiasm as a belief that any of the state’s media education goals are being met. They do, nonetheless, claim that “New Mexico and Massachusetts, followed by Utah and Minnesota, probably have the greatest proportion of students actually receiving media education” (p. 38).

This research highlights the needs of our education systems. They note that educators must recognize that communication in our society has changed enough in this century that traditional training in literature and print communication is no longer adequate. They urge that teachers be provided with in-service training on the integration of media education into their curriculum.

Theoretical Debates in Media Literacy Education

The Center for Media Literacy (2007) states that “media literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to Internet” (¶ 4).
In recent years, however, there has been growing concern among educators and scholars that media channels are changing the landscape of our environment and that efforts must be made to stay abreast of this new phenomenon. In response to the influential role of the media in our society, Ellen Krueger and Mary Christel (2001) argue:

With the growing glut of media outlets and media messages, a need to equip a student, any and all students, to be able to analyze and respond to a media text critically becomes a vital component of language arts education, because the visual languages of media are even more difficult to negotiate than the written language of the traditional curriculum. (pp. viii-ix)

Steinberg and Kincheloe, in their introduction to *Rethinking Media Literacy: A Critical Pedagogy of Representation* (McLaren, Hammer, Scholle, & Reilly, 1995) note that educators periodically voice the need for media studies in North American schools; however, “such ideas are not typically met with great enthusiasm by the educational establishment; indeed, some of the responses are disturbingly hostile” (p. 1). They state, nonetheless, that the authors of *Rethinking Media Literacy* (McLaren et al., 1995) believe media literacy education should be established in schools because “educators must understand the multiple contexts that shape the identifications and desires of students, including the shared experiences they bring to the classroom” (p. 1). Without an understanding of how cultural texts may be constructed differently by individuals in different situations, “the impact of media will always be reduced to a simplistic cause-effect relationship between the producer and the receiver” (p. 2). They argue, therefore, that a critical media literacy program requires that students should not only develop the ability to interpret media messages, but they must also be mindful of the ways they consume and effectively embrace the media (p. 2).
A key concept of media literacy education is “understanding how media bias confines and defines public discourse on diverse issues” (Semali, 2000, p. ix). Semali argues that the goal of critical media literacy is not to be seen as an antidote to help students learn to disconnect themselves from texts that are designed to take advantage of them. Instead, “the broader goal is to cultivate systematic methods of inquiry, models of critique and analytical ways of reading visual images and messages embedded in both print and electronic texts” (p. ix). Such a concept discourages protectionism with its goal of defining acceptable culture.

Semali emphasizes inquiry and questioning, noting that when students question texts, they will learn more and therefore produce knowledge of their own. She urges students to question what they see on television and the Internet and to be more conscious of what they listen to daily on the radio and in songs, and learn to detect the bias or misrepresentations that may be present (p. ix). Semali believes that when students engage in “authentic questioning, they will actively deconstruct prepackaged knowledge found in textbooks, films, songs, web pages and other media texts” (p. x). Through critical media literacy, “students will better understand the inequalities and violations of social justice the media continue to peddle through multiple forms of imagery found in the entertainment programs and culture products that students consume every day” (p. x).

Kellner (1995) states that we are bombarded daily by the media from the day we are born to when we die, and for that reason we must learn to understand, interpret, and criticize its meanings and messages (p. xiii). On the question of why media literacy is important, Brown (1998) states that beyond the transfer of values in learning skills related to critical thinking, is “the phenomenon of mass media’s pervasiveness in contemporary
society” (p. 47). He believes that in recent decades print and motion pictures have been replaced by radio and television as dominant forms of communicating entertainment and information to the general public. According to Brown, “television continually grows in its influence on individuals’ and society’s use of leisure time, on awareness of political and social reality, and on forming personal values in culture and ethics” (p. 47).

Therefore, the major goal of media education is to help audiences of mass communication become “active, free participants in the process rather than static, passive, and subservient to the images and values communicated in a one-way flow from media sources” (p. 47).

Adams and Hamm (2000) agree with Brown. They assert that, to be literate, individuals must have the ability to decode messages from all types of media. Everyone must go “beyond the traditional basics of reading, writing, and calculating” (p. 3). They emphasize that every student today, across the curriculum, needs to learn to understand and create messages through various experiences with many forms of print and nonprint media. They comment thus:

As new interlocking technologies increasingly shape our future, it is important to explore the possibilities and the problems. The power of today’s information, communication, and networking media requires special attention. But it would be foolish to provide too warm a welcome without more serious thought. (pp. 3-4)

According to Adams and Hamm, if today’s youths are to function effectively in this technologically saturated society, they need a solid media knowledge base. They must learn how to evaluate their media choices, understand the underlying values, and use each medium for creative sensibility (p. 4).

Masterman (1985) enumerates many reasons why media education warrants “the most urgent priority” (p. 2). He points out sociopolitical considerations as well as the
media’s metamorphosis into “consciousness industries” noted for the “manufacture of information” disseminated by them. He points to media literacy education as a means to help citizens learn how media representations can reflect, modify, or distort various aspects of reality and how symbol systems mediate our knowledge of the world.

Brown (1998) elaborates on a process that may be successfully adopted by media educators. He states, “A key to effective educational process in media literacy programs is respect for the individuality of every person, including each one’s distinctive upbringing” (p. 48). Media educators should avoid teaching their own opinions and conclusions but rather train their students in the process of “selective discrimination, analytical observation, and reasoned assessment based on factual data judged according to meaningful criteria” (p. 49). This approach views students as unique individuals who bring to the table their own personal media experiences. The teacher’s role is that of a mentor, assisting students in their efforts to engage in the critical thinking process.

According to Semali (2000), the goal of media literacy education is to provide an educative process enabling students, as well as their parents, to disentangle themselves from bias, myths, clichés, and illusions created by mass media. When critical pedagogical tools are employed, media literacy helps students interpret stacked meanings embedded in the stories they read and the characters they encounter in media texts. Media literacy enables individuals to question the motives of the producer, writer, and distributor, as well as to understand the larger social context—such as history, socio-economic status, the author’s familiarity and comfort with the subject matter, and benefits and privileged position in the culture within which the media story is created (p. 4).
Semali (2000) argues that media literacy should engender an active, nonpassive manner of mass media participation. Such participation, she claims, will help learners to analyze, compare, interpret, and find a meaning that is different from the usual, routine, and preferred meaning. Preferred meanings emphasize the existing interpretation or ideology. According to Semali, if one reads or views media text in the “preferred” way, the text’s interpretation or meaning will be obscured. It will “coincide with mythical beliefs, clichés, and stereotypical or hidden bias” (p. 5). Conversely, when critical media literacy strategies are applied when viewing or reading mass media texts, the reader or viewer is able to evaluate the texts using multiple frameworks that go beyond the myth, cliché, and stereotype. He or she is then able to make an “informed decision to either question the proposed premise/explanation of the media text, or to partially accept it, or even reject it completely” (p. 5). Such critical reading and interpretation of media texts is what Semali sees as the “active and nonpassive reading, viewing, and listening” that individuals can learn from the critical pedagogy of media literacy education.

In his book, *Teaching Media Literacy*, Masterman (1985) argues that it is only a matter of time before schools will realize the need to critically analyze media texts and visual images. The vacuum between the dominant print-based education in the classroom and education outside of school continues to expand, and the likelihood of shrinking the gap is not within view (p. 14). He adds:

Schools continue to be dominated by print. To have difficulties in decoding print is, in school terms, to be a failure. Outside of school the most influential and widely disseminated modes of communication are visual. As we have seen, television is probably the most important source of political information in our society and is regarded by most people as the most reliable source of news, perhaps because of its ability to present a visual record of events. Even print is coming to be regarded as visual medium. Layout, design and typography are widely understood to be a significant part of the total communicating process, whilst even the term ‘print media’
is frequently a misnomer, since in most texts print is rarely unaccompanied by visual images. (p. 13)

Masterman (1985) urges schools to recognize the necessity of teaching students to “examine visual images critically” (p. 13). He believes there are strong arguments for the establishment of media education in schools, “not only as a specialist area in its own right, but across the curriculum as a necessary adjunct to literacy in the teaching of all subjects” (p. 14).

In an article in the Journal of Communication, Hobbs (1998) delineates seven dilemmas impacting the media literacy movement. Referring to the question of whether or not media literacy education should focus on protecting young people from negative media influence, she points out that this pedagogical approach is basically an authoritarian stance. This perspective has been viewed by many scholars as unrealistic and ultimately ineffective. According to Hobbs, many teachers from the K-12 to university levels have found that students have not been very responsive to the idea that they are helpless victims of media influence who need to be rescued from their indulgence in the media culture (p. 19). She states that the inoculative method “may cause students to parrot the correct interpretations—the ones the teacher has sanctioned—and, in doing so, media literacy education may lose its authenticity and relevance to students’ lives” (p. 19).

Another issue debated among media literacy educators and scholars is whether media literacy should be taught as a separate subject or integrated within the existing curriculum. Some educators have expressed the concern that “when a topic or skill is supposed to be developed across the curriculum, it may end up invisible” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 25). On the other hand, she notes, “Virtually every educator recognizes the value of
infusing media literacy concepts across the curriculum,” particularly given the fact that there has been an increasing use of media texts to teach a variety of subjects in the school (p. 25).

The diversity of perspectives among educators in the field of media literacy is another key issue. Hobbs (1998) states that educators and scholars with disciplinary backgrounds in media studies (the fine and performing arts, history, psychology and sociology, education and literary analysis) often defend their own understanding of what it means to “access, analyze, evaluate, or create media texts without a full awareness of the extent of the complexity, depth, or integrity of various other approaches” (p. 16).

Commenting on the antagonism generated by this diversity, Bob McCannon, then director of NMMLP, noted that “whenever media literacy educators get together, they always circle the wagon—and shoot it!” (p. 16). As a result of the tensions thus generated, Hobbs (1998) raises an interesting question that should be taken to heart by all media literacy proponents: Does the wide diversity of perspectives among educators serve as a source of strength, or does it suggest the problematic nature of an expansive and unstable concept of media literacy?

This diversity of approaches, philosophies, and goals of media education may be an inevitable result of an emerging field, and, according to Hobbs (1998), these tensions may limit collaboration on various projects of significance. However, she points out, “this field is finally beginning to percolate as a result of experiment in the laboratories of the public school” (p. 17).

Adams and Hamm (2000) believe “everyone should have access to literacy in its most powerful forms” (p. 3). American children have spent many years mastering the
traditional literacy systems and how to use them fluently, but, as noted earlier, they must now go "beyond . . . reading, writing, and calculating" (p. 3).

McLaren et al. (1995) recommend taking a hard look at the new society created by multimedia technologies. They pose the following thought-provoking questions:

- How are the subjectivities and identities of individuals and the production of media knowledge within popular culture articulated?
- To what extent does the hyper real correspond to practices of self and social constitution in contemporary society?
- Do we remain "sunk in the depressing hyperbole of the hyper real," encysted in the monologic self-referential of the mode of information?
- Or do we establish a politics of refusal that is able to contest the tropes that govern Western colonialist narratives of supremacy and oppression?

What isn’t being discussed is the pressing need within pedagogical sites for creating a media literate citizenry that can disrupt, contest, and transform media apparatuses so that they no longer possess the power to infantilize the population and continue to create passive and paranoid social subjects. (pp. 195-196)

McLaren et al. (1995) propose that critical media literacy recognizes that we live in a photocentric, aural, and televisual society in which the proliferation of photographic and electronically produced images and sounds serves as a form of media ritual—a norm-setting vehicle—which individuals learn to reference for making their everyday decisions. Critical media literacy is necessary to help answer the question: "How do essentially arbitrarily organized cultural codes, products of the historical struggle among not only regimes of signs but regimes of material production also, come to represent the ‘real,’ the ‘natural,’ and the ‘necessary’?" It enables students and teachers to understand the dangers in considering literacy to be a private or individual competency—or set of competencies—rather than a complex circulation of economic, political, and ideological practices that inform daily activities (p. 201).
According to McLaren et al. (1995), it is paramount for students as well as teachers to understand how the process of representation and identification works. Critical media literacy is directed towards putting the understanding of social struggles within a culture and the definition of social reality over what is considered the legitimate and preferred meaning at any given moment (p. 201).

Semali (2000) urges teachers, students, parents, and administrators to think carefully about the implications of the new media. Undoubtedly the time has come to expand traditional education and curriculum to include television, film, video, and computers. However, “using critical pedagogy to integrate the new forms of visual and electronic ‘texts’ represents a curriculum requiring new competencies and a new definition of what constitutes learning as well as how and when it takes place” (p. 7).

Semali believes, therefore, that teachers must be trained in the emerging literacies:

By forging connections between these emerging literacies, the learning process is no longer disconnected from institutional, legal, cultural, political, and economic factors that surround the texts students read, whether from textbooks or from the screen. These contexts of media “text” are crucial to making meaning and lead to many questions: Who produces multimedia texts? Visual images? For whose consumption? For what purposes? What alternative images are thereby excluded? (pp. 7-8)

These questions form the core of critical media literacy. Through media literacy students will be able to interpret and understand how meaning is made and derived from all texts found in textbooks, photographs, and electronic visuals, images, and messages. He adds that “this new way of looking at curriculum extends the sphere of pedagogical practice beyond school to include the modern media as a powerful institution that occupies a large portion of students’ time” (p. 8).
Messaris (1998) in his article, “Visual Aspects of Media Literacy,” argues that a critical part of media literacy is understanding the “language” of the media, that is, the “representational conventions and rhetorical strategies of ads, TV programs, movies, and other forms of mass media content” (p. 70). Developing an understanding of how visual language functions can be useful in media education production as well as in helping students in “resisting the potentially negative influences of visual media” (p. 77).

Zettl (1998) asserts that “media aesthetics is the necessary foundation of media literacy and that we need to know how the basic aesthetic building blocks are used to create and shape our cognitive and affective mental maps” (p. 81).

The knowledge of how a specific mass medium such as television operates, how we react to its specific audiovisual stimuli, and how we use it to clarify, intensify, and interpret significant events around us is an essential prerequisite for the effective and responsible production and discerning consumption of media messages. (p. 83)

This study is grounded on the arguments of Silverblatt (2008), Kellner (1995), and Masterman (1985), which state that individuals should be taught how to read and criticize the media as well as produce alternative media and culture. Kellner (1995) has argued that, since the media themselves are forms of pedagogy, critical media pedagogy should play the role of countering media pedagogy by teaching individuals how to read media texts [and] criticize them. . . . This is a form of “fighting fire with fire.” This study, therefore, follows the notion of questioning media texts, using media text to counter media contents.

The Status of Media Literacy Education in the United States

Media literacy is an established field of study within the international academic community. England and Australia have emerged as leaders in the discipline of media
education with performance and content standards, norm-referenced tests, and pre-service university training for a specialty in media education.

Significantly, the United States has lagged behind in the media literacy movement (Silverblatt, 2001, p. 8). Patricia Aufderheide (2003), reporting on the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy sponsored by the Aspen Institute in December, 1992, noted:

It is ironic and also understandable that the United States is the premier producer of international mass media, but that media literacy is only beginning in this country. The United States has a culture fascinated with individualism and [the] potential of technology to solve social problems. Its culture is also pervaded with commercialism such that as one participant argued, it simultaneously produces a ‘culture of denial’ about the cultural implications of commercialism. Media literacy is thus an especially difficult challenge in the United States. (Building on Experience, ¶ 7)

Hobbs’s (1998) summary of seven ongoing debates in the media literacy movement sheds light on the current status of media literacy programs in the United States (p. 16). She points out that, although the definition of media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms has been accepted by a growing number of scholars, its interpretation has been quite diverse. She notes that, in 1992, Tyner (as cited in Hobbs, 1998) compared the emerging media literacy movement in the United States to the parable of the blind men and the elephant, in which each blind man sensed only a tiny part of the whole (p. 16). Hobbs observes:

Educators and scholars with disciplinary backgrounds in media studies, the fine and performing arts, history, psychology and sociology, education, and literacy analysis each may vigorously defend one’s own understanding of what it means to access, analyze, evaluate, or create media texts without a full awareness of the extent of the complexity, depth, or integrity of various other approaches. (p. 16)

Hobbs attributes this diversity of perspectives among educators as the reason for mounting tensions as these educators attempt to collaborate on projects of significance.
Hobbs (1998) stresses that the United States “lacks the national-level cultural organization or governmental agencies, comparable to the British Film Institute or the National Film Board of Canada, that might advocate and provide media education” (p. 26). Teacher education, according to Hobbs, continues to be decentralized, poorly organized, and uneven in quality. As a result, it is difficult to develop coordinated, multi-state initiatives to provide continuing education to the nearly 3 million teachers employed in the United States (p. 26).

Kubey (1998), in his article, “Obstacles to the Development of Media Education in the United States,” states that the United States finds itself in the ironic position of being the world’s exporter of media products but lagging behind every other major English-speaking country in the world when it comes to formal delivery of media education in its schools (p. 58). In this article, Kubey notes that, in the United States, New Mexico and North Carolina have put in place significant statewide initiatives and that Wisconsin and Minnesota, as well as a few other states, are developing upcoming initiatives as well.

Kubey (1998) offers a few reasons the United States has had a problem emerging as a front-runner in the media education movement. He states,

Having 50 states spread across 3.6 million square miles, all with different educational authorities, and each with scores of local boards, has led to greater isolation of media educators in the U.S. than has been the case in smaller countries or in those with fewer provinces or states. (p. 59)

Another problem affecting the progress of the media literacy program in the United States originates with the priority parents put on their children becoming computer literate over becoming media literate. Even if parents encourage their children to seek media literacy goals, other issues emerge within the teaching process. According
to Kubey (1998), “Teachers wonder how just one more thing is to be added to an already burgeoning curriculum” (p. 62). Curricular additions over the past several years such as AIDS prevention, anti-bullying and peer support programs, and computer skills, along with a lack of support for teachers, have made it difficult for media literacy to gain momentum.

Notwithstanding the problems mentioned above, Kubey (1998) observes that there are many hopeful signs that media education is gaining support in the United States. Although many obstacles remain, he notes:

   It is better that we are aware of what they are and address them directly than ignore them and rely solely on the impressive passion and commitment of thousands of media educators in a country still so substantially ambivalent and uncertain about media and art, leisure and technology, education and government, or its own future. (p. 68)

The Need to Support Pedagogical Change

According to Semali (2000), “One major irony is that American education has failed to develop a philosophy or pedagogy based on the role of visuals in instruction while it has spent an increasingly large share of its budget on iconic technologies such as computers, VCR’s, video cameras, and interaction video” (p. 2).

He continues:

The technologies of reading, writing, and viewing have outpaced our pedagogy, our curriculum and instruction methods, and the definitions of what it means to be literate in multimedia America. Moving into the twenty-first century, print no longer dominates our lives as it did in the nineteenth century. (p. 2)

Wiles and Bondi (2002) assert that the demands of 21st-century technological advancement have out-paced present-day pedagogy.

As we begin life in the twenty-first century, what has transpired during the past two hundred years in schools is no longer a certain or reliable guide to what is happening
Professional educators need new frameworks for the study of education and particularly for the field of curriculum. Our old views are now handicapping us in adjusting to the new age of technology. (p. 4)

They continue:

A “system break,” an event that has yet to be fully understood, has occurred and will continue to change education forever. We need, in the words of Joseph Murphy, a new scaffolding upon which to construct education in this new century. A fundamental and irreversible change in the meaning of the term curriculum has happened, and we are now in a critical period of adjustment in education. (p. 5)

Wiles and Bondi (2002) delineate the obstacles that are often encountered in attempting to make pedagogical adjustments. They note:

The response of professional educators to these significant changes has been guarded. Overwhelmed by the ever-expanding scope of the new knowledge base, we have broken it down to focus on isolated learning. Testing has become our escape hatch from having to address these conditions. Education leaders have failed to address the meaning of the new technologies because of a real fear that we’ve lost control of what we do. We have continued to do the “same old thing” when we know that such behavior is certainly dysfunctional and detrimental to the students in our care. The old curriculum questions—What is worth knowing?, How do we learn?, or What is essential?—must be revisited and redefined by curriculum workers. The field of curriculum is the essential element in this renewal process, and public education will fail or adapt to technological changes according to the response of curriculum leadership in our schools. (p. 6)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) have recognized the need to enrich the language arts curriculum with a set of skills that will help students study media texts (Krueger & Christel, 2001, p. ix). Krueger and Christel argue that technology and mass media offer “a gamut of new choices and challenges for the well-informed teacher and student” (p. ix). They are concerned that the “lack of attention to critically evaluating and creating texts produced through these technological advances diminishes the individual’s ability to compete in future academic and workplace settings” (p. ix). Recognizing this concern,
the NCTE has challenged teachers through its standards to prepare students to use technology effectively and critically to understand the texts it produces (p. ix).

Howard Gardner in *Frames of Mind* (1983, as cited in Krueger & Christel, 2001) describes seven intelligences within the human mind. Krueger and Christel advocate the teaching of media as a way to develop the spatial, musical, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences, which “a traditional language arts curriculum has often ignored” (p. ix). Krueger and Christel contend that Howard Gardner’s study has given teachers theoretical permission to integrate nontraditional texts and analytical activities related to those texts in order to play to an individual student’s academically nontraditional strengths and to expose other students to aspects of their intellect that need further development or exploration. (p. ix)

However, according to Krueger and Christel (2001), English/language arts teachers have little or no formal training in the analysis of media texts, the overt and covert messages sent by the media. Though some techniques from the pedagogy of literature and composition can be transferred to the analysis of print and non-print media texts, “relying on those techniques doesn’t fully reveal the potential and artistry of film, television, advertising, or journalism” (p. x).

**The Efficacy of Media Literacy Training for Teachers**

As American culture becomes increasingly inundated with media messages and images, various advocates and educators are looking to media literacy education as a means of mitigating their impact on society. Several studies indicate that media education, when implemented in the curriculum, reduces the potentially harmful effects of TV violence on youth.
According to the Kaiser Family Foundation report (2003a), students in the third and fourth grades “given a course in literacy decreased their time spent watching TV and playing video games and reduced their use of verbal and physical aggression as judged by their peers” (p. 2). A study of another year-long critical viewing curriculum cited in this same report resulted in children in the early grades watching less violent TV and identifying less with aggressive characters (p. 2). Yet another study revealed that media literacy interventions can help high-risk youth develop more responsible decision-making skills in their own lives (p. 2).

The Kaiser Family Foundation report (2003a) noted several other studies pointing to the efficacy of media literacy training. It cited an evaluation of Flashpoint, a media literacy curriculum implemented by the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice System, which indicated that deconstruction of media messages helped juveniles think critically about the consequences of their behavior. A program conducted by the New York State Office of Children and Family showed benefits in “involving high-risk youth at an early age in media literacy training” (p. 2). Another study found that media literacy education increased children’s understanding of the persuasive intent of ads relating to alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. The participants were less likely to expect positive results from drinking, choosing alcohol-related products, and desiring to be like individuals who drank (p. 3).

Hobbs and Frost (1998) agree with many media literacy advocates that media literacy education works. Their emphasis in the 1998 study, Instructional Practices in Media Literacy Education and Their Impact on Students’ Learning, focuses on staff development, not on the curriculum itself. They state that “emphasis on staff
development as a means to introduce media literacy into K-12 environments began to develop in the early 1990s, after the influential Media Literacy Leadership Conference sponsored by the Aspen Institute” (p. 125). They stress that a week-long Harvard Institute on media education was implemented in 1993 and 1994 at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, drawing educators with interest in media studies, cultural studies, and education reform from all over the nation. According to Hobbs and Frost, this was the first of a number of staff development programs that began to emerge in the United States in the 1990s.

During the summer of 1995, Hobbs (Hobbs & Frost, 1998) was invited to conduct a week-long graduate-level media literacy course focusing on the central issues in media education. The basic framework of the model used consisted of critical questions around six key themes: audience, agency, technology, languages, representation, and genres. The “course included activities designated to strengthen teachers’ media analysis skills, plus intensive discussion of controversial issues relevant to media and youth, including the impact of violence, the representation of gender, race and class, and the social context of media consumption in the context of a consumer culture” (p. 129). “Found” texts in newspapers, radio, television, and magazines were used for analysis. The course briefly introduced the 30 teachers to various kinds of materials, curricula, and videotapes available to integrate media literacy into various subjects.

Rather than focusing on training teachers to use a specific set of materials, resources, or tools, the goal was to inspire teachers to make connections between their existing curricular goals, their existing classroom practices, and the activities of media analysis and media production for students. As part of the coursework, teachers were
required to develop a unit of instruction with lesson plans and resource materials suitable for a week’s instruction, applying the key concepts of media literacy to their subject areas (Hobbs & Frost, 1998).

Results showed that many teachers reported satisfaction with their learning experience and implemented the curriculum they had developed during the 1995-96 school year. The group continued to meet during staff development opportunities that became available through a federal grant awarded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) in Washington, DC, for the purpose of encouraging “teachers from all subject areas to explore how issues of adolescent health (alcohol, tobacco and drug use, sexuality and body image, nutrition, violence) could be explored through media perspectives” (Hobbs & Frost, 1998, p. 129).

When the designated staff development project was completed, results of the instructional impact of media education on student learning were measured. Hobbs and Frost (1998) concentrated on testing results gathered from activities presented by ninth-grade teachers and the performance of ninth-grade students. The entire ninth-grade class had been divided into four teams and had implemented block-scheduling, which encouraged the integration of media literacy concepts into the curriculum.

The instruments were administered to students over a 2-day period. One of the instruments used was a text from a television news program targeted to teens. According to Hobbs and Frost (1998), “A team of students saw the six-minute video in a large room, and then were moved into two smaller rooms to complete the questionnaires” (p. 137). Approximately 30 minutes were required for students to complete the items.
Comprehensive skills were measured by asking students to complete five multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions regarding factual content of the newscast. The questions focused on the students’ ability to recall information that was verbally, graphically, and visually presented in the segment.

Media literacy skills were measured by asking two multiple-choice questions and five open-ended questions designed to measure the students’ ability to identify the newscast’s target audience, the newscast’s sources, the differences and similarities between the newscast and local or network news, techniques in the newscast designed to attract audience attention, and the ability to identify facts which were omitted from the segment (Hobbs & Frost, 1998).

Media consumption habits and behaviors were measured by questions exploring students’ viewing habits; the number of working TVs in the home; subscriptions to cable television, daily newspaper, and/or weekly news magazines; and the number of people in the family. From data collected, the number of hours was coded, as well as the target programs of news, talk shows, or reality TV programs. The open-ended questions were coded by two coders who had an inter-rater reliability of greater than 90%. ANOVAs and regression analyses were conducted using the BMPD statistical package. According to Hobbs and Frost (1998), this study suggests that media literacy initiatives which attempt to reach large numbers of students in a school district may depend on the leadership and facilitation by a dedicated individual, but that a program of staff development plus support and enthusiasm from a large number of faculty is essential as well. (p. 139)

The researchers (Hobbs & Frost, 1998) concluded that teachers need to be comfortable and confident before they can include new approaches, topics, and activities into their classrooms. The results also revealed that staff development experiences
providing opportunities for discussion of issues relating to the integration of media studies and education can encourage the development of professional relationships between teachers who facilitate active collaboration between colleagues. The results of this quantitative research on students’ learning show that students’ media literacy skills were highest for those students participating in a program of instruction where media education activities are integrated across all subject areas, where teacher-generated activities and materials were used, and where explicit connections were developed.

Students’ ability to recall and remember information presented on television was higher for those participating in a program in which film and video texts were used with highest frequency, on a daily or near-daily basis, in an instructional context in which students were required to retrieve information from visual sources. The researchers (Hobbs & Frost, 1998) note that this study did not include a control group and other components of experimental design and, therefore, has limited generalizability. However, it does explore “possible connections between teachers’ strategies, choices, and philosophy in approaching media literacy in the classroom and the specific patterns of ability in the performance of students on media analysis and media comprehension skills” (p. 139).

Hobbs and Frost (2003) conducted a quasi-experiment comparing 293 students at Concord High School enrolled in Grade 11 with a random sample of 89 students from a control school, located within 50 miles from the treatment school (p. 339). This study measured students’ comprehension and message analysis skills in response to three nonfiction message formats: reading a print news magazine article, listening to a U.S. National Public Radio (NPR) audio news commentary, and reviewing a television news
segment targeting teenagers. Comprehension skills were measured after exposure to each message through a written response to open-ended questions. Writing skills were measured by coding a sample of open-ended response text for word count, holistic writing quality, and the number of spelling and usage errors. Analysis skills were measured after exposure to each message with open-ended and checklist items to determine students’ ability to identify purpose, target audience, construction techniques, values and point-of-view, omitted information, and comparison and contrast (p. 340).

Students in the treatment group who received the yearlong program of media literacy instruction in Grade 11 were compared to a control group in a different school district who received the pretest and posttest with no treatment. Students in the media literacy treatment group had higher reading comprehension scores than the control group. Students in the treatment group wrote longer paragraphs than control-group students (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, p. 344). According to this study, media literacy education incorporated in the curriculum may also improve students’ message comprehension, writing, and critical-thinking skills (p. 350).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study with a case study design sought to document a media literacy program in the United States. According to Yin (2003), “Case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). NMMLP was chosen as the organization to be studied. The study investigated curricular materials, instructional practices, and training program.

This chapter presents a detailed description of the research design, including the research questions, the participants, the methods for collecting data, and the procedures used to collect and analyze the data.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide my research:

1. What is the New Mexico Media Literacy Project? What is the story behind its development?
2. What processes does this organization employ in its training program?
3. What instructional practices do the trainers use in their presentations?
4. What curriculum materials does this organization utilize in its training?

5. How does this organization select and produce materials for its training?

**Study Design**

Since this study is descriptive in nature, it only makes sense to describe what one has seen and experienced. In order to experience something, one must be a part of that environment. As Patton (2001) puts it, “The first-order purposes of observational data are to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities” (p. 262). There is no substitute for the direct experience of being there personally.

Since understanding of human experience is not a given, being with a person or in a situation becomes one of the ways that the human-as-instrument comes to understand the person or setting under investigation. If it is true, as Ortega taught, that we comprehend only what we see being born (Silver, 1978), then indwelling is the way qualitative researchers understand persons and situations, as indwelling allows the researcher to see things coming into existence. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 29)

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), “research studies that are qualitative are designed to discover what can be learned about some phenomenon of interest, particularly social phenomena where people are the participants” (pp. 43-44). They argue, therefore, that “the results of a qualitative research study are most effectively presented within a rich narrative, sometimes referred to as a case study” (p. 47).

Patton (2001) maintains that qualitative researchers, in order to have a true knowledge of the phenomena under study, must be part of the environment. He states:

Then, my children, you must go out into the world. Live among the peoples of the world as they live. Learn their language. Participate in their rituals and routines. Taste of the world; smell it. Watch and listen. Touch and be touched. Write down what you see and hear, how they think and how you feel. . . . To understand a world you must become part of that world while at the same time remaining separate, a part
of and apart from. Go then, and return to tell me what you see and hear, what you learn, and what you come to understand. (p. 259)

As Merriam (1998) puts it:

Case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. This specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems—for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice. (p. 29)

Since this study incorporated a case study design, I was able to obtain an in-depth understanding of the development of a media literacy organization and experience the training process as well. To truly understand the training teachers receive for teaching media literacy as well as the instructional materials available to them, it was essential that I gain access to the setting and talk with those involved. It was necessary to investigate the processes used to educate students and the perceptions and feelings of those instrumental in developing them.

Kenny and Grotelueschen, as cited in Merriam (1998), suggest that case study is appropriate when the purpose of the investigation is “to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of a program. When it is important to be responsive, to convey a holistic and dynamically rich account of an educational program, case study is a tailor made approach” (p. 39).

The feelings and perceptions of those interviewed regarding their experiences with the media literacy program are an important part of the study. Their voices told their story. Featherstone (1995) notes:

Often stories contain our best wisdom in its most complex yet most accessible form. When we distill that wisdom into maxims or propositions, we lose much of the richness of what we have learned, and often tell readers less than they already know. Our story embeds what we have learned in all its rich complexity; the story changes as our understanding of it changes. (p. 95)
In qualitative research, life story interviewing is an important means of gathering information. Atkinson (2001) maintains that humans think and speak in story form and bring meaning to their lives through storytelling (p. 121). In this qualitative case study, I allowed the participants to tell the stories of their personal experiences in the media literacy movement. Thus, the final product reaffirms the outward expression of each individual’s personal experiences.

**Selection of Media Literacy Organization**

Merriam (1998) suggests that the most appropriate sampling strategy to use in qualitative research is nonprobabilistic—the most common form called purposive. Purposive sampling is based on the premise that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and must therefore select a sample from which he or she can learn the most (p. 61).

Patton (2001) posits:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 230)

Because I was attempting to acquire an in-depth understanding of the development of a media literacy organization and the instructional practices employed by media literacy educators, I employed a purposive sample. The selection of a purposive sample would contribute the maximum amount and quality of information to achieve this goal.
Criteria for Sampling

The purposive sample consisted of a media literacy organization that met all of the following criteria.

1. The organization must have an active media literacy training program.
2. It must have a well-established website that promotes media literacy education.
3. Organization must have been established for at least 10 years.
4. Organization should emphasize most of the media literacy education guidelines as outlined by the National Association for Media Literacy Education. These guidelines include:
   a. Fostering active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create
   b. Expanding the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media
   c. Building and reinforcing skills—necessitating integrated, interactive and repeated practice—for learners of all ages
   d. Developing informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society
   e. Recognizing that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization
   f. Affirming that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages
5. Organization needs to have a well-established curriculum that spells out its objectives.

Three professional associations promoting media literacy met the majority of these criteria. These included: the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles; the National Telemedia Council in Madison, Wisconsin; and the New Mexico Media Literacy Project (NMMLP) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I chose to collect my data from NMMLP because it was more closely aligned with the selection criteria mentioned above.

**Tools/Procedures for Data Collection**

Several tools were used to collect data for this study, including: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) observations, and (c) artifacts. These data were collected between July and December 2008. In qualitative research, the main instrument for gathering data is the researcher. As Merriam (1998) notes, “The investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 20). This allows the investigator to maximize his or her opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. (See Table 1.)

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the “qualitative researcher attempts to gain an understanding of a person or situation that is meaningful for those involved in the inquiry” (p. 26). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that a human-as-instrument is the only instrument that is flexible enough to navigate the complex and constantly changing human experience.

It would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered; because of the understanding that all instruments interact with
### Table 1

**Criteria for Sampling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Center for Media Literacy (CA)</th>
<th>Media Ed. Foundation</th>
<th>New Mexico Media Literacy Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established 10+ Years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Promoting Media Literacy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Media Literacy Program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides Training in Media Literacy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides Coaching in Media Literacy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Includes Attributes:

| Active Learning & Critical Thinking            | Yes                           | Yes                  | Yes                               |
| All Forms of Media (videos, advertising, books, magazine, Internet, etc.) | Yes                           | Yes                  | Yes                               |
| Skills for Learners of all Ages               | Yes                           | Yes                  | Yes                               |
| Informed, Reflective & Engaged Participants   | Yes                           | Yes                  | Yes                               |
| Media-Culture & Socialization                 | Yes                           | Yes                  | Yes                               |
| Construct Meaning                             | Yes                           | Yes                  | Yes                               |
respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping
and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; because the intrusion of
instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements and that shaping can
be appreciated and evaluated only by a human; and because all instruments are value-
based and interact with local values but only the human is in position to identify and
take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases. (pp. 39-40)

My interest in media literacy education began during the 7 years I taught in high
school and college. I learned that young people spend a lot of time watching television,
playing video games, and surfing the Internet. I discovered that most of the video games
they played were violent and that this was supported by research. I also recognized that
children were bombarded with thousands of violent acts on television. Media had
become such major sources of entertainment that my students would rather watch Romeo
and Juliet on a DVD-ROM rather than read it in print. Most of them had no interest in
completing reading assignments. I found above all that these media messages had a
negative impact not only on the students with whom I came in contact, but those in
society as a whole.

Having recognized the universality of mass media and its negative impact on
youth, even those from Christian homes, I felt compelled to research more into this
developing phenomenon. I began a journey that has allowed me to learn how individuals
can be taught to minimize the impact of the negative influences of media.

As I planned a site for my research, I reviewed the purpose of my study—to
explore the processes and techniques used to train individuals to implement principles of
media literacy in various settings. I turned to the National Association for Media
Literacy Education (NAMLE), formerly the Alliance for a Media Literate America
(AMLA). This organization gives guidance and support to media literacy groups in the
United States and internationally. It offers yearly conferences that allow media literacy
groups to come together to present papers, report research findings, promote media resources, and network.

Because of its credibility, I decided to use NAMLE’s key principles for establishing criteria for selecting the site for my study. From these principles the six selection criteria were drafted. I selected three sites for examination. As I used the criteria to assess each site, I discovered each was aligned to the selection criteria. However, upon closer investigation, I observed that NMMLP had a more comprehensive training program, providing instruction throughout the United States in English and in Spanish.

Interviews

The purpose of an interview “is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2001, p. 341). As Patton explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. . . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. . . . We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. (pp. 340-341)

Patton (2001) believes “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341).

Patton, therefore, urges the researcher to:

Go forth now. Go forth and question. Ask and listen. The world is just beginning to open to you. Each person you question can take you into a new part of the world. The skilled questioner and attentive listener know how to enter another’s experience. If you ask and listen, the world will always be new. (p. 340)

I interviewed the media literacy trainers at the New Mexico Media Literacy Project in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The following are the members of the NMMLP staff interviewed for this study: Andrea Quijada is the Executive Director of the
organization. She is responsible for the daily operation of the Project and directs the educational aspects of the organization. Omar Ahmed is the Director of Community Outreach. He is responsible for scheduling presentations, trainings, and workshops held all over the country. He also plans for the different conferences in which NMMLP staff present.

Christie McAuley is the Director of Curriculum Development. She is responsible for planning and developing NMMLP’s curriculum. Denis Doyon is the multimedia producer and media educator. He is responsible for producing the DVD-ROMs and CD-ROMs for NMMLP. Jessica Collins is the Associate Program Director and works in various areas of the Project, including teaching and producing the DVD-ROMs and CD-ROMs. She also writes grants, handles administrative duties, and assists in managing the budget. Paula Williams was the Executive Director of NMMLP, but was moving to a different area of work and had assumed the temporary role of Assistant Executive Director. In this capacity, she was responsible for the daily functioning of the organization, overseeing its financial affairs as it operated under the guidelines of a 501c3. She participated in fundraising efforts and reviewed documents pertaining to grants.

Through interviewing I was able to enter into each individual’s perspective of media literacy education. I used semi-structured interview questions; that is, the questions were more or less open-ended. Semi-structured questions allowed for flexibility of responses from the respondents. Thus, it allowed me to follow up according to changing or emerging situations and new ideas that arose (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). In this case, it
allowed the phrasing of the questions to be modified according to the respondent’s previous comments or understanding of the question.

**Interview Questions**

1. What is the New Mexico Media Literacy Project? What is the story behind its development?
2. Could you describe your role in this organization?
3. Can you describe your training program?
4. What theory and processes are utilized in the design of the training program?
5. What curricular activities do you find to be useful in this venture? And why?
6. What instructional practices do you use in the training program?
7. What successes and challenges have you encountered in the training program?
8. Do you feel that the organization has accomplished its goals?
9. Are there other goals this organization wishes to accomplish?
10. What metaphor would you use to describe your program?
11. What curriculum materials are utilized in the training program?
12. How does this organization select and produce materials for its training?
13. How does this organization support trainees in transferring new skills into their environment?

Although these questions formed the basis of the interviews, I did not limit my questions solely to this list. Additional questions were asked when warranted by the responses of the individual being interviewed. Each interview was transcribed in its entirety.
Observations

Another form of data collection used in this study was observation. The purpose of observation, according to Patton (2001), “is to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed” (p. 262). The description must be factual, accurate, and thorough to make the report meaningful and relevant. Patton emphasizes that:

The quality of observational reports is judged by the extent to which that observation permits the reader to enter into and understand the situation described. In this way, evaluation users, for example, can come to understand program activities and impacts through detailed descriptive information about what has occurred in a program and how the people in the program have reacted to what has occurred. (p. 262)

According to Merriam (1998), observation is an important research tool. Through observation an observer, as an outsider, “will notice things that have become routine to the participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the context” (pp. 95-96). Observation, along with interviews and document analysis, can serve as a means to triangulate emerging conclusions.

Project Documents

Program documents were an important source of information used in conjunction with interviews and observation. According to Patton (2001), program documents “provide valuable information because of what the evaluator can learn directly by reading them” (p. 233). These documents can provide stimulus for generating questions that may be pursued through direct observation and interviews. In this study, program documents provided important information concerning the historical background of the organization as well as its activities and practices.
Ethical Considerations

“In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 213). Prior to the interviews, I provided each participant the opportunity to sign an informed consent form promising them safety, protection, and privacy. A permission letter was obtained from the program director before approaching the participants. Prior to starting the data collection process, I procured clearance from the Andrews University Human Subjects Review Board.

To protect the authenticity of the data, I digitally recorded the interviews. Field notes were also taken as needed. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The completed transcriptions were then returned to each participant for review and validation. After making corrections, if any, I then began the analysis of the data.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by coding emergent themes or concepts in the interviews, rather than formulating pre-determined theme categories. I began analyzing the data upon completion of the first interview. The participants’ responses were aligned with the purpose of my study. I then compared the first and second interviews. This process helped me refine my data collection. Merriam (1998) notes that “the right way to analyze data in qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 161). She underscored the significance of simultaneous data collection and analysis in and out of the field. (See Table 2.)

Merriam (1998) observes that “the coding scheme can be quite simple, as in identifying a theme that can be illustrated with numerous incidents, quotes, and so on. Or
### Table 2

**Data Triangulation Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions/Data source</th>
<th>Observation/Field Notes</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Document/Product Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the New Mexico Media Literacy Project?</td>
<td>Field notes from interviews</td>
<td>Director Main trainer Producers Other trainers</td>
<td>Website Marketing materials Product catalogs Printed curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story behind its development?</td>
<td>Field notes from interviews</td>
<td>Director Main trainer Producers</td>
<td>Website Marketing materials Printed curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What processes does this organization utilize in its training program?</td>
<td>Training sessions</td>
<td>Director Main trainer Producers Other trainers</td>
<td>Training videos Training materials (handouts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What instructional practices do the trainers use in their presentations?</td>
<td>Training sessions</td>
<td>Director Curriculum director Curriculum Producers</td>
<td>Website Marketing materials Product catalogs Printed curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What curriculum materials does the organization make available to trainees?</td>
<td>Training sessions</td>
<td>Director Curriculum director Curriculum Producers</td>
<td>Website Marketing materials Product catalogs Printed curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this organization select and produce materials for its training?</td>
<td>Curriculum development sessions</td>
<td>Director Curriculum director Producers</td>
<td>Organizational documents related to curriculum development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
it can be quite complex, with multilevels of coding for each incident” (p. 164). In my study I used several levels of coding. I read each transcript, noting recurring themes, and color-coded the selected passages according to their themes. For the purpose of comparison, I had a few people read and code a transcript as well.

**Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) note:

Just as the conventional investigator must attend to the question of how internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity will be provided for in the design, so must the naturalistic inquirer arrange for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. (p. 247)

Therefore, as the primary instrument of data collection, I kept in mind the following underlying questions suggested by Lincoln and Guba:

1. How can one establish confidence in the “truth of the findings of an inquiry for the respondents with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?” (p. 290).

2. To what extent are the findings of an inquiry applicable in other contexts or with other respondents?

3. Is it possible to replicate the findings with same or similar respondents?

4. Do the results of the findings arise from the characteristics of the respondents and not from the biases, motivations, and perspectives of the inquirer?

Merriam (1998) maintains that regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented. (p. 200)
To establish trustworthiness in my inquiry, I sought for detailed responses from the participants. With the use of extensive quotations from each respondent, it was possible for me to avoid misrepresentation of his or her statements. The respondents were given an opportunity to cross-check the transcriptions to verify their authenticity when a draft of chapters 4 and 5 was sent for review and feedback. The participants provided clarification via telephone and e-mail. Corrections were made to these chapters to incorporate the suggested feedback.

Other questions arose pertaining to the sequence of events in the history and development of this organization as I worked through the process of editing these chapters. These too were clarified by the key participants of the study. Again information was checked and cross-checked for accuracy. This clarification was a key part of the triangulation process and helped establish the validity of the information reported in this study.

The data were then examined to extract the overarching themes. Only emerging themes from the respondents were noted. My personal observations were not included in the themes.
CHAPTER 4

THE WORK OF THE NEW MEXICO MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to tell the story of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project (NMMLP). Information will be drawn from interviews with both past and present directors and its current staff. To authenticate the validity of the information obtained in the interviews, information will also be drawn from the organization’s archives and its website.

Entering the Inquiry: Perceptions of NMMLP

In an attempt to gain an understanding of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project through the eyes of others, I asked the question, “What is the NMMLP?” The responses were many and varied.

NMMLP’s founder, Dee Dee Downs, stated that the organization helps individuals learn how to read and understand a media text and its implications. “I still think that knowing how to read all forms of media, all forms, is one of the greatest exercises in critical thinking that we can give to our children” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 1). Denis Doyon, Director of Media Production at NMMLP, said, “They would train people
in media literacy, and they would go out in their community or their schools and be catalysts for change there” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 2).

Paula Williams, outgoing Director of NMMLP at the time of the interview, began her response by noting that the name “New Mexico Media Literacy Project” does not fully describe the work this organization actually does. According to Paula, its media literacy work goes beyond the boundaries of New Mexico to other parts of the United States and other countries as well. As Paula phrases it, “the name New Mexico Media Literacy Project can be somewhat limiting because truly we do work around the country” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 1). She emphasized that NMMLP as an organization is designed to teach media literacy skills enabling individuals to accurately interpret media messages.

According to Christie McAuley, Director of Curriculum Development, NMMLP’s goal was to cultivate “critical thinking and activism in our media culture to build healthy and just communities” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 2). She explained further that the work of the organization is that of helping “educate young people and adults to think more critically about the media messages that they’re exposed to” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 2).

Andrea Quijada, Director of Education for NMMLP at the time of the interview, gave an in-depth response recognizing not only the need for individuals to be accountable for their own media consumption but also the need for becoming media literate citizens who hold lawmakers accountable for creating sound media policy, as well. She stated:

As a media literacy project, what that means is that we work with . . . either teaching and/or supporting people who are already doing the work, getting folks to think critically about media, about our media system, about media ownership, about issues of representation, issues of media access and media distribution in people’s communities and how that impacts our lives. . . . And also . . . we look at media policy through a media justice lens . . . to make sure that we hold law-makers accountable for creating media policy that is effective and representative of people and prioritizes people’s needs over those of corporations. (Vol. 1, Section 6, pp. 1-2)
A document from a 2004 media literacy seminar in St. Louis conducted by Bob McCannon, director of NMMLP for 13 of its first 14 years, elaborates on the mission and history of the organization. It states that NMMLP uses “state-of-the-art multimedia, CD-ROMs and videos to illustrate major skills and issues in media literacy” (Vol. 2, p. 1). Additionally, NMMLP shows teachers, students, parents, business people, professionals, and other citizens how media literacy can create freedom as well as relieve cynicism, apathy, and stress. This source notes that, in 2003, its “presenters gave presentations and workshops to thousands of people. Many of those events were outside of New Mexico” (Vol. 2, p. 1). The document indicates NMMLP also offers a 4-day “train the trainers” Catalyst Institute, which, by the year 2003, had graduated approximately 1,000 people.

NMMLP is also involved in research. By 2004, under the leadership of Bob McCannon, the organization had conducted eight research studies involving over 21,500 students. NMMLP produces CD-ROMs and videos that are sold to individuals, schools, and other organizations. One of the first videos produced under Bob’s direction was Just Do Media Literacy. He also created what he described as the world’s first media literacy CD-ROM, Understanding Media. This resource contains 229 media examples, 74 of which are video clips, and covers 33 skills and media issues, as well as 400 pages of text resources. The 2004 handout from the St. Louis media literacy seminar also notes that “Bob McCannon, Executive Director of NMMLP, has educated over 10,000 pediatrics in 50 different workshops for the American Academy of Pediatrics and other major medical organizations. NMMLP’s free newsletter, The State of Media Education, goes to 15,000 people” (Vol. 2, p. 1).
NMMLP has since hosted several national conferences featuring authorities in the field of media literacy such as Sut Jhally, Naomi Klein, Neil Postman, Bill McKibben, Danny Schecter, Robert McChesney, George Gerbner, Jane Healy, Susan Douglas, Howard Zinn, Stewart Ewen, Jim Hightower, Jean Kilbourne, Gloria DeGaetano, Jim Metrock, John Stauber, Wally Bowen, Janine Jackson, Victor Strausberger, and Gary Ruskin (Vol. 2, p. 1).

NMMLP’s website (NMMLP, 2010a) states that its presenters deliver dynamic multimedia presentations at conferences, workshops, and classrooms across the country. According to the website,

Our media literacy curricula and action guides, including DVD-ROMs, CD-ROMs, and videos, are used in countless classrooms and communities in all 50 states and abroad. NMMLP’s Catalyst Institute and other training programs have empowered thousands of people to be advocates and activists for a media literate society. (NMMLP, 2010a)

**What Is the New Mexico Media Literacy Project?**

It follows then that NMMLP is a group of dedicated media specialists whose purpose is to teach people how to be media literate. NMMLP, through presentations at conferences, workshops, and classrooms across the United States, emphasizes the need for the members of our society to become critical thinkers and activists as they negotiate the media culture and environment. This organization custom designs programs to meet individual needs, including a yearly 4-day training program called the Catalyst Institute designed for individuals in various professions, including teachers, health professionals, and media specialists (Vol. 3, Section 1, p. 1).
Training and Presentations (What They Do)

NMMLP utilizes a variety of methods in training individuals to become media literate. The website states the following:

NMMLP presenters are available to speak to your school, professional organization, place of worship, or community group. We offer dynamic multimedia presentations using lots of media examples so that everyone in the audience—from the smallest preschooler to the seasoned media activist—can improve their media literacy skills. (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010g)

Presentation Topics

NMMLP offers presentations on numerous topics. These include Media Literacy 101, Media Literacy for Youth, Media and Bullying, Media & Domestic Violence, Media and Gender Stereotypes, Media & Healthy Relationships, Media Ownership, Media & Health, Health Disparities, Media Literacy for Tobacco Prevention, Smoking in Hollywood Movies, Media & Dating Violence Prevention, Media Literacy & News, Latinos & Media, Marketing to LGBTQ Communities, Native American Images in Media, and Media Literacy & Visual Arts.

Presentations to Students and Young People

NMMLP has created programs for young people in kindergarten through the 12th grade. “We deliver media literacy presentations to hundreds of K-12 students each year. Our ‘Introduction to Media Literacy for Prevention’ presentations are ideal for classrooms and school assemblies (Vol. 3, Section 3, p. 5). NMMLP also offers longer training programs. It states, “Our five-day curriculum provides more in-depth instruction, including many hands-on activities” (Vol. 3, Section 3, p. 5).
NMMLP produces customized presentations on specific topics as well as half-day and full-day trainings for young people. It is heavily involved in the area of media and health and has developed a 5-day media literacy curriculum for the middle school classroom. The website offers the following description of this curriculum:

NMMLP presenters will spend five days in middle school classrooms to help students develop critical thinking skills and apply them to important health issues in their lives. The classroom presentations include interactive dialogue about dozens of media examples, as well as creative small group activities. All students are pre/post-tested by school staff. In addition, each school library receives a complete set of NMMLP resources so teachers can continue to provide media literacy education. (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010e)

Presentations for Adults

The staff at NMMLP provide media literacy education not only to young people but to adults as well. According to the website, “Adults need to be media literate. We can speak to your parents association, community group, or professional organization on a variety of media literacy topics” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010b). The staff present media literacy concepts and skills to teachers, counselors, and health professionals each year. They deliver keynote addresses at conferences as well as present hands-on workshops in breakout sessions.

NMMLP offers customized training that helps individuals not only to become media literate themselves, but to have the expertise to teach and train others. According to the website, “Media literacy training gives you the tools you need to help other adults and youth become more media literate. You not only learn basic media literacy skills, you learn how to share them with others” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010c).

Training opportunities are also offered each year in what NMMLP calls its “Catalyst Institute.” The Catalyst Institute is “an intensive four-day training experience
in media literacy concepts and skills. Workshops, exercises, video screenings, and discussions deepen your understanding of media issues and provide a solid foundation for media activism” (Vol. 3, Section 4, p. 7). The website describes the Institute in this way:

Since its founding in 1993, the NMMLP has trained thousands of media educators and media activists from across the country in our acclaimed Catalyst Institute. This intensive four-day training in media literacy concepts and skills has planted many seeds over the years: our ‘catalysts’ have integrated media literacy into a wide range of work, and many have created new programs and new organizations. (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010d)

The Catalyst Institute has been a successful venture. However, in keeping with the ever-changing nature of the field of media literacy, the organization decided, in 2009, to change its format. The following reasons were given for this change:

One agenda no longer fits everyone’s needs, and there’s so much going on in the field that one can’t possibly fit it all into four days. While the need for training in basic media literacy skills is still great, many people are now looking for more advanced training opportunities. And everyone is looking for training options that are convenient and economical. (Vol. 3, Section 5, p. 9)

Presently NMMLP is exploring the following options:

1. Intensive 1- and 2-day trainings in various parts of the country
2. Basic, intermediate, and advanced media literacy training programs
3. Specialized trainings for teachers, community organizers, media activists, etc.
4. Online “webinars” on specific topics

Updated information will be made available on the organization’s website. Information will also be sent via NMMLP’s e-newsletter to update individuals of such changes.
Five-day Media Literacy Curriculum Training

While the Five-day Media Literacy Curriculum is specifically designed for students, NMMLP also provides a Five-day Media Literacy Curriculum Training for Teachers. The objective of this training program is to prepare educators to implement the curriculum in their classrooms. The website states, “NMMLP will be training fifteen middle school educators to implement NMMLP’s five-day training curriculum in their schools. Participants will receive a DVD-ROM containing the curriculum, as well as other NMMLP resources” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010a).

Media Literacy for Prevention Training

Media Literacy for Prevention is a training program NMMLP has developed in the area of health. The multimedia presentation Media Literacy for Tobacco Prevention specifically targets the media’s influence on tobacco use and has been delivered in numerous schools. According to NMMLP’s website, “This year [2010], we will be training ten TUPAC [Tobacco Use Prevention and Control] contractors to deliver our basic tobacco prevention to students. Participants will receive a DVD-ROM containing the presentation, as well as other NMMLP resources” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010e, Media Literacy for Prevention Presentation Training, ¶ 1).

Customization of Training

As noted earlier, NMMLP’s training programs are often customized to meet the needs of the audience. Several responses during the interviews supported this observation. For example, Paula stated:

It’s a multimedia, intense conversation about media because I really think that we adjust what we’re doing based on the responses of the participants. . . . We have different groups that have different needs, and . . . sometimes a group will need
different information, and I think it’s important to be responsive to that. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 3)

Omar commented, “I think predominantly what folks know the project for are the customized trainings, workshops, and presentations we do” (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 1). This observation was reiterated by Jessica when she concluded, “So we really develop our trainings and presentations for the specific needs of the group or community” (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 1).

Paula spoke of Andrea’s competence in adapting the training to the needs of participants at a moment’s notice:

Honestly, that’s one of the gifts that Andrea truly has. She can on the fly, adjust a program and adjust a presentation based on the group that she’s working with. And that’s a skill that we’re very, very fortunate to have. And other staff members can do that as well, but Andrea can do it, literally, she can do a one eighty. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 3)

Both Andrea and Paula referred to the variety of NMMLP’s training programs. Paula stated, “We have a variety of different training things that we use” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 5). She explained that, for example, the New Mexico Department of Health, Tobacco Use Prevention and Control (TUPAC) collaborated with NMMLP in the development of a 6-day curriculum which NMMLP is “actually changing . . . to a five-day, so that we have the opportunity to work in school with students five days in a row” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 5). Andrea noted NMMLP’s work on behalf of various minority audiences in the United States as well as for the youth:

We have done specific presentations on target marketing of tobacco and alcohol. How are Latinos targeted? How are African-Americans targeted in the U.S.? And how is the Gay/Lesbian community targeted? How does that impact health and health disparities within the present communities? (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 4)
NMMLP’s presentations on media ownership focus on who owns the media, how the media function, and how ownership impacts media policy on such issues as target marketing.

**Operational Theory**

For an organization to function effectively, it must have an operational theory to drive its work. However, NMMLP has not until now formulated a specific premise or theory to serve as its operational guide. When Denis was asked to describe the theory which directed NMMLP’s operation, he stated that the organization employed “an approach that views media literacy as a set of skills, just as literacy, as with reading and writing, is a set of skills” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 2). According to Denis, NMMLP teaches people how to acquire skills to help them understand media messages even as reading skills are taught to extract meaning out of what is being read.

Christie stated that the organization formulated its teaching process based on what had worked well for them. She noted that their work was tested, and the results led them to adopt the principles they believed to have produced positive results.

I wasn’t a part of that when they were testing certain things out, but I think that probably came from people’s different presentation styles and also trying different things with the audiences and figuring out what works and what seems to be the most effective way to deliver our messages and get the information across that we would like to teach or that we would like folks to walk away with. (Vol. 1, Section 5, pp. 4-5)

Andrea categorically stated, “I would say I don’t think that I personally as a trainer rely on a particular theory that I am conscious of” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 5). “For me personally, most of how I teach and what I do comes a lot out of my instincts and
reading the audience” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 4). She noted, however, that many who witness her presentations have told her that her work resembles that of other scholars. Regarding her teaching method, for example, Andrea explained that she finds out what the audience knows and then determines what information to present to them. In the process of doing this, she feels that not only is her teaching more effective, but that she also learns from her audience.

Paula, however, asserted that NMMLP does in fact extract some of what they do from models in the field of media literacy education. She stated, “I think what we try to do is explore all the models and pull parts that work” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 4). She argued that one does not need to follow a specific pattern. “Some people believe if you don’t break it down into answering these eight questions, you’re not doing media literacy” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 4). She noted that NMMLP does not believe in one particular theory but instead pulls different ideas from different organizations. “We use effective presentation modeling . . . we use hands-on, what work[s] with students, what works with adults. And we continue to test it, and we continue to get feedback” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 5).

Although the staff members of NMMLP indicated that they had not adopted a specific operational theory, the methods they use resemble those promoted by noted media and education scholars. For example, Kellner (1995) argues that, since the media themselves are forms of pedagogy, critical media pedagogy should play the role of countering media pedagogy by teaching individuals how to read media texts, criticize them, and produce alternative media and culture. During the 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute, I observed NMMLP staff promoting the deconstruction of video clips and
magazine and newspaper advertisements to counter the messages conveyed. The participants learned to use deconstruction techniques to decode the messages and to produce alternative media by creating counter ads.

According to Silverblatt’s framework (2008), understanding the process, context, framework, and production values of each media text is essential. Silverblatt describes the significance of feedback in the communication process by encouraging individuals to ask questions to better understand the communicator’s intent. He notes the need to understand the context in which media issues operate. In the 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute, the instructional practices used included giving opportunities for feedback and questions, as well as discussion of current issues and their social context. As the participants learned the various persuasion techniques used by the media, they were able to identify the production values of a media message.

Masterman (1995) states that the “central unifying concept of media education is that of representation”; that is, the media do not reflect reality, but simply represent it. He states that “media education is essentially active and participatory, fostering the development of more open democratic pedagogues.” Students are encouraged to take more responsibility for and control over their own learning. As I observed and interviewed the staff of NMMLP, I realized their teaching philosophy mirrored Masterman’s framework and criteria for media literacy (1995).

The teaching model of NMMLP also resembles the model promoted by Joyce and Showers (2001) as discussed on page 161 of this document. Therefore, although NMMLP does not officially subscribe to a particular operational theory, their work utilizes many strategies advocated by noted media literacy proponents.
The Staff of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project  
(Who Does It)

Each staff member at NMMLP has a specific title, but they all perform multiple 
tasks within the organization. They seem to be a unique group who collaborate in 
promoting the work of NMMLP and who put the interest of the organization above their 
own. Jessica pointed out that, although her current title is Associate Program Director, 
she works in multiple areas within the organization. She explained:

I kind of do a little piece of pretty much everything. So it’s divided, depending on 
what projects are going on. There might be a certain time of the year where I’m 
presenting a lot. There might be a time of the year where I’m producing one of our 
DVD-ROMs and I’m pretty much just on the production computer working on that all 
day. So it varies, but my job is divided between presentations; producing our multi-
media resources, our DVD-ROMs; developing curriculum that may or may not be on 
that DVD-ROM; writing grants and looking for new funders; doing the administrative 
duties for the project; working with the Executive Director on budgeting; organizing 
all our data bases; doing the weekly product orders; and those types of duties. (Vol. 
1, Section 7, p. 1)

As others described their role at NMMLP, I found a similar train of thought as 
they described their responsibilities. Omar said:

I actually do quite a few different things, but primarily my title is Director of 
Community Outreach, so I’m responsible for all components of that, predominantly 
looking for scheduling and taking care of our presentations, trainings, and workshops 
that we do nationally and internationally. In addition to that I also handle our 
conference schedule, and by that I mean the conferences that we attend, that we 
present at, that we exhibit at. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 1)

Omar explained that the organization receives numerous requests to attend conferences; it 
is his responsibility to evaluate which conferences would be a good fit for NMMLP. He 
said, “So part of my job is to evaluate that and see what conferences are we best suited 
for and which ones provide us with the best fit and visibility” (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 1).

Regarding his responsibilities, Denis stated:
I have two principal hats—we all have multiple hats—but one is media production. So that involves right now mostly the website we have, and actually three websites that we have, that I created and maintain, and some involvement in the creation of the DVD-ROMs and CDs. And then another hat is coordinating some of the projects that are under our TUPAC grant, specifically our “Smoke-Free Movies” project and the “Talk Back to Big Tobacco” script and storyboard contest, and then some other smaller projects, again under TUPAC.

Christie, as Director of Curriculum Development, tests new curriculum on various populations to ascertain its usefulness and application during training. She admits that she, as well as the other staff, does more than her job title indicates:

So I think because we’re a small organization, the work that I actually do is broader—actually all of us—but the work I do is broader than my title because I do more than develop curriculum materials as it is with a lot of non-profit jobs. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 2)

At the time I scheduled her interview, Paula was the Executive Director of NMMLP, but during the interview itself she was moving to a different area of work and had assumed the temporary role of Assistant Executive Director. However, she described her work as Executive Director with oversight of the entire organization in this way:

It was my job to make sure that we were budget compliant, that we complied with all of the Academy accounting standards because it’s very important, since we operate under their 501c3. So it’s important that we didn’t do anything to put them in jeopardy. I’m also responsible for staff oversight for making sure that staff members are completing their jobs correctly. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 3)

The Executive Director was also responsible for raising funds as Paula noted in the following paragraph:

And I also worked on/with fundraising. I didn’t necessarily do all the fundraising. We have a grant writing team where we review grants. We looked at different funding sources. For instance, the new product development that we are doing—I helped to develop that plan, but I will say ‘helped’ because we are a staff that works together and collaborate. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 3)

Andrea had just assumed the position of Executive Director, and her response to the question regarding her role with the organization produced the following response:
My current role is Executive Director. In this capacity, I am responsible for doing all our budget, maintaining our fiscal prudence, and managing all staff, managing all programs, and will be the primary contact for most of our public interactions that we do. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 3)

She continued by describing her previous role in NMMLP:

Prior to this, I was the Director of Educational Programs. In that capacity, I was the primary trainer for the organization. I traveled in-state, nationally, and internationally, representing the project in various capacities, from again providing training to teachers, to health professionals, to community organizers, to participating in delegations to both the U.N. World Summit on the Information Society in 2005, to heading a delegation on communication rights along with Prometheus Radio Project and Third World Majority to Caracas, Venezuela, for the World Social Forum in 2006, and I also participated as part of MAGNet, the Media Action Grassroots Network, in the U. S. Social Forum last year in Atlanta. That would have been 2007. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 3)

When I asked her how she was going to be handling the responsibilities she now has, she answered:

Right now, what it means is I’m doing a lot of everything, and that will not be happening forever, but that’s currently what is taking place. I am doing the Executive Director work. Luckily we still have Paula on staff. She’s assisting. She’s technically my assistant. Her title is Assistant to the Executive Director, so I have someone who can help do some of the E. D. work because I am still doing some of the presentation work.

One can see how this organization is unique in its operation and how collaboration has been crucial for their success.

**Design of NMMLP’s Training Programs (How They Do It, Part 1)**

**Training Design**

**Interactive Training**

When responding to the question concerning NMMLP’s training programs, Christie reported that all presenters use interactive, hands-on training activities and model what they expect people to learn. She elaborated:
So when we’re doing a “train the trainer,” we try to model the information we give through presentations, and we structure our training so that people can have a hands-on experience, whether it’s in a small group or as a participant in a large group. And I think that’s what helps make it effective and also makes it really tangible for people to walk away with something. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 3)

Christie noted that information is communicated to the learners “in a way that’s interactive so we’re not lecturing or we’re not telling people how to think in a certain way, but giving them information and then also giving them the information in a way that’s palatable for them” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 3). Andrea also noted the elimination of the lecture format, enabling group members to learn concepts through active involvement. She summarized this teaching style in the following manner:

We describe [our presentations] as being interactive and multi-media as we really work [on] getting people to know how to deconstruct, getting people to walk away with strong or new critical thinking skills, and ultimately my hope, and this happens with some presentations but not always with all of them, is to get people to take action. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 4)

Curricular Activities

The curricular activities of NMMLP reveal its responsiveness to changing technologies and public interest. The trainers in this organization must stay abreast of advances in the media and address the current interests of the community within which they operate. Omar pointed this out when he said:

It is because [media literacy] can be applied very readily to topics that are of strong public interest at the time, whether it be health and nutrition, obesity, tobacco, body image, gender. These are all topics that are of strong interest to the public at large. . . . Now some of that is generated by news media, which creates either a fear factor or an interest factor in some of these topics. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 3)

Jessica noted, “Our curriculum is always changing, too. There’s a curriculum that we created several years ago that I would never use today . . . for many reasons. . . . The media examples might be old. They might not be the best quality” (Vol. 1, Section 7, p.
3). Omar commented, “Yes, we look at the topics that are generating strong interest, and that’s why we have to be so fluid, so very fast in how we produce these resources because the interest of the general public changes very quickly” (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 3).

One example Omar used in describing the public’s changing interest in specific topics was the oil crisis. He stated that a year before the oil crisis, the public did not pay much attention to the price of gasoline, but when the price skyrocketed, interest in the topic peaked, and people were more likely to pause and listen to commentary on this issue.

Paula, noting the importance of current and timely illustrations for presentations, stated:

We try to be timely . . . for instance, today when we showed “The Twilight Zone” clip; it’s forty years old, but it’s classic. So we will use some of those. But we also try to provide information that’s fairly current for a lot of different reasons. One, it’s because the media landscape is changing so quickly that it’s important to be responsive. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 6)

But Paula also noted the expense involved in keeping the curriculum current and described what NMMLP is currently doing to keep its resources on the cutting edge of public interest:

Having said that, we can’t update our products all the time because, again, as a non-profit we’re just not able to do that. So we try; we’re actually in the process of putting together an online delivery system where we’ll be able to share kits that people can buy, and we’re really working to make them at affordable prices, or, hopefully, [with] some free funding through some grants. . . . We’ll be able to have online delivery so people can click on and get some kits about information that they need. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 6)

**Media Examples**

Media examples are important tools in NMMLP’s training programs. Adults, as well as young people, need examples to help foster understanding. Andrea explained, “I
often don’t use the products when I present. I use the clips from the products, but drop them directly into my format” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 8).

Christie, too, is a strong believer in the use of media examples:

I would say I think the use of the media examples is definitely something that makes our work stand out and makes it interesting and accessible. And also . . . [with] the use of media examples . . . people are able to, in education we call it scaffolding, . . . connect previous knowledge with something new. So they’re able to grow using some of their background knowledge, but also using that as a foothold or a foundation for new information. So I think using the media examples . . . really appeal[s] to people. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 5)

**Hands-on Activities**

Yet another teaching tool utilized by NMMLP is hands-on activity. On this topic Christie stated:

And the other thing I would say is the hands-on activities, anything that the learners can do where they’re able to answer questions or work in small groups with say, for example, a media example, and deconstruct that, or they’re able to create a counter ad as opposed to just us telling them, ‘Well, this is how a counter ad is created.’ We allow them to experience it. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 5)

Andrea also noted the usefulness of hands-on activities in NMMLP’s media literacy training program. She described one of her experiences using this method:

With this particular training, I did a hands-on component for them. . . . They all had laptops, and . . . I walked through the different products, and I gave them time to explore the products because, on the final day, they did a five-minute presentation [in which] they had to use the products. . . . So they were using their laptops. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 8)

**Teamwork**

Developing teamwork was also identified as an important element of the NMMLP training program. Andrea’s use of this element was highlighted when she stated, “When
working with young people, . . . I’ll play a game where they break into teams. It’s also teaching them teamwork” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 8).

**Instructional Practices in NMMLP’s Training Programs**

The staff of NMMLP use a variety of instructional practices in their training programs such as the summer Catalyst Institutes. Basic media content and concepts are often introduced and explained within the context of discussion, questioning, media examples, small-group interaction, and role-play—some of the instructional approaches used in the training.

During her interview Andrea reflected on some of the approaches used in her training programs. These included questioning, assessing prior knowledge, and dividing the participants into small groups. She illustrated these by describing one of her training sessions:

I had them pair off and ask each other some questions that I had up on the screen, including: What did they like about media, not like about media? What did they think about media literacy/tobacco prevention? What did they know about it, if anything? What did they want to get out of the training? (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 7)

Andrea explained that she often refers to these responses to connect to ideas the participants had previously mentioned. For example,

Some people said that their concern was the bias in the media. So later, if I was talking about product placement, I would say, “That creates bias, right? If a company has a contract with a show, for them to say something positive about their product in the show, that creates bias even though, yes, it’s entertainment, and even though it’s a prime time show, there’s still bias in those shows. It’s not just the news that we see it; it’s everywhere.” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 7)

Christie also noted the use of media examples and questioning as instructional practices in her trainings, saying, “But I think [being effective] goes back to using . . . a
variety of media examples . . . asking questions and getting responses” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 5). Andrea gave an example of her use of media examples, saying, “I play a commercial. I have their handouts in front of them, and . . . usually I say, ‘Give me at least three to five techniques of persuasion I use in these clips’” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 7).

Andrea described how demonstrations and explanations are often used to encourage concept attainment during the trainings. Opportunities for reflection and application are also included. For example, during the presentation of key concepts, she tries to get participants thinking by modeling for them how they could present the concepts to young people. Later she asks the participants to reflect and apply their understanding of this information by saying, “Please think about how you would frame this with the young people that you work with” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 7).

Another method used in NMMLP’s training presentations is satire. According to Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (“Satire,” 2009), through satire, human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, ideally with the intent to bring about improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, the purpose of satire is not primarily humour in itself so much as an attack on something of which the author strongly disapproves, using the weapon of wit. (¶ 1)

Andrea spoke of her use of this literary element when teaching the deconstruction of advertisements to discover the methods of persuasion used by the media:

Using satire, I think, is also really an effective tool, not just with young people, but for adults as well. When we see things that are constructed to mock something else, it gets really clear. . . . That’s a tool that I like to use when I present. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 7)

When asked about the use of satire, Bob McCannon noted, “Satire can be effective, but it is a fine line. . . . Of course, this is something that all good teachers recognize. Media literacy is not a magic bullet; it depends on excellent teaching.”
Resource Design

**NMMLP Training Resources**

NMMLP produces media literacy DVD-ROMs, CD-ROMs, and videos for teachers, health professionals, activists, parents, and youth. These multimedia resources include numerous teaching examples. The website states, “Our multimedia resources are jam-packed with media examples—TV commercials, movie clips, newspaper and magazine articles, web pages and more that you and your students can analyze, deconstruct, and discuss” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010f). The website also points out that their DVD-ROMs and CD-ROMs contain lesson plans or discussion guides centered on the media examples to help teachers and their students develop media literacy skills.

The most recently released DVD-ROM, *Media Literacy Toolbox*, according to NMMLP’s website, provides a complete and interactive introduction to media literacy concepts, skills, and applications. It contains over 100 selected media examples from television commercials, magazine ads, TV and radio shows, and newspaper and magazine articles with over 30 printable activities and discussion guides (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010e).

In addition to the *Media Literacy Toolbox* DVD-ROM, NMMLP has also introduced a new website: medialiteracytoolbox.com. With this new resource, educators, students, activists, media makers, parents, and others may browse, purchase, and download “media literacy kits” on various topics. According to the website, each downloadable literacy kit contains media examples (TV commercials, magazine ads, scenes from Hollywood movies, websites, etc.) that can be shown in a class or group
setting. It also has printable discussion and activity guides with questions and answers for each media example, as well as background information, education standards, and resources for further study. Additionally, each kit contains suggestions on how to use the media literacy kits with students, community groups, and others, as well as instructions and technical support for users.

Other Media Literacy Resources

Three other recently released DVD-ROMs are: Media Literacy for Prevention, Media and Bullying, and Media and Body Image. Media Literacy for Prevention has five lesson units which teach media literacy skills by examining tobacco, alcohol, and food marketing. Each unit is designed for a 45-minute session and includes discussions and activities. Media and Bullying is “a multimedia presentation with printable discussion guides that help learners explore the topic of youth-related bullying by deconstructing movie clips, news articles, website information, and magazine ads” (Vol. 3, Section 17, p. 1). Media and Body Image, according to the website, includes two multimedia presentations and a printable discussion guide to help learners deconstruct reality TV clips, commercials, and magazine anti-aging and weight loss products. It analyzes differences between products targeting men and those targeting women. More importantly, it discusses the media’s “ideal” body image for men and women and explores how this affects eating disorders and dieting (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010b).

NMMLP has also produced various media literacy CD-ROMs dealing with consumerism, wellness, and how addiction can be reversed. All these and more can be found on the organization’s website.
Curriculum Materials for Training Programs

When asked about the curriculum materials used in its training programs, Omar described NMMLP’s curriculum as “the ever changing landscape of the field” (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 8). However, in the traditional sense, this organization utilizes a variety of materials in their training programs. Some of these materials include media examples, for example, DVD-ROMs and CD-ROMs with media clips, movie clips, TV commercials, actual copies of counter advertisements, newspaper and magazine articles, handouts, etc. These items were mentioned by several of the interviewees.

Denis indicated their curriculum materials consist primarily of media examples and questions asked in order to deconstruct their meaning. He elaborated on the use of these materials by saying:

You can’t do media literacy without looking at examples from media, whether that’s a TV commercial or a scene from a movie, or a newspaper article, or a cover of a magazine, or a website. Those are all examples of media products, media messages that are out there. And our whole approach to learning and to teaching is to look at or listen to those media examples and ask questions about them. And using those deconstruction questions, using the language of persuasion, using other kinds of questions, we can start to learn something about the media message. We can learn something about our society and how media play a role in maintaining certain structures in our society or changing them. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 5)

Selection and Production of Materials for Training Programs

NMMLP produces materials inspired by the current issues of the day. These issues are often taken from items highlighted or promoted in the media. Examples of these include the transition to digital television and the presidential election. Ideas for selection and production are generated during interaction with the general public. Paula described this approach to selection by saying, “It’s based on issues that we have had
feedback [on] from constituents” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 10). Jessica clarified this further, explaining,

If someone wants a presentation on alcohol . . . we’ll pull together all of the alcohol ads that we have, and if there’s five that are similar, we’ll probably just choose one. And also it depends on what the objectives are. If someone wants a presentation that’s on media and alcohol, . . . we’ll try to get it down, is there anything more specific? Are you wanting to just look at magazine ads? Are you wanting to look at commercials? Are you wanting to look at alcohol, mostly beer, or are you wanting to look at commercials that target females, commercials that target young people? . . . So if there’s more of a focus, too, then we’ll narrow it down. We don’t want to use five different media examples that can illustrate the same point, but we want to get media examples that illustrate various points that we’re trying to get across. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 7)

Materials are sometimes produced at the request of a funding organization.

TUPAC (New Mexico Department of Health, Tobacco Use Prevention and Control) is one of these organizations. Denis elaborated,

So for example, TUPAC. I think it was two years ago they got some additional funding to do some work on spit tobacco, smokeless tobacco. So they put out a RFP to groups around New Mexico, “I want you to submit proposals for something that addresses the problem of spit tobacco.” So we responded to that by saying, “We can produce a CD about spit tobacco marketing and do some training and distribute it to people who are working on this issue.” So they said, “Great. Go ahead and do that.” They gave us some funding to do that. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 5)

Materials are sometimes selected based on the prior experience of the NMMLP team. Omar expanded on this idea by saying,

Well, we’re always exploring because we each have different interests. Because we have different backgrounds, different experiences, we continue to bring in information from those respective fields. Like myself, I have a strong background in non-profit public relations and marketing, and because of my past experience in those fields, I’m always connected to those areas. So, not to say that I only bring to the table information/materials from those fields, but predominantly because of my access to those fields in the past, I can now bring materials to the table and say, “This is a new marketing technique that’s happening. This is something that I think would be of interest to the public,” and then now bring it to the table. And as a group, we discuss things, and we say, “Okay, can we use this as a stand alone idea? Do we want to incorporate it with other ideas that we’ve been hearing, we’ve been seeing? In what way does it incorporate our own basic principles, our own basic foundation?”
So we look at several of those things, and it’s a discussion process. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 8)

Materials are sometimes selected and produced based on issues which have been neglected. One example is the issue of bullying. In speaking about this Denis explained,

And sometimes it’s just issues that we think from interactions with people. . . . “This issue isn’t being addressed. There is no other resource out there for people on this issue. So let’s do something,” [which led] to the media and body image DVD that we just produced and the one coming out this fall on media and bullying. We saw a need in schools. There are a lot of teachers who are addressing these issues, wanting to address these issues. They didn’t really have a resource that addressed the media’s role in those. So we said, “Here’s something that we can provide.” (Vol. 1, Section 3, pp. 5-6)

In the process of selecting and producing materials to meet the needs of its constituents, NMMLP is able to meet some of its own financial needs. Denis articulated this in this way:

Frankly, here is something that we can sell, that can help our organization. There will be a market for it. . . . For commercial considerations, we do raise our own budget, so the sale of our products is part of that. So we need to do something that we think people are going to want to buy. (Vol. 1, Section 3, pp. 5-6)

Paula further explained how the financial needs of NMMLP were being met by both the sale of its products and the use of state grants for their distribution:

So what we do, we’ve found a way that we can independently on our own produce [a resource], but then we can use the state funding to distribute it. That way we can also use it for a resource for us because then we can also sell it independently to others, and that way we can have additional funding. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 10)

Support for Trainees

The staff of NMMLP make every effort to support the people they have trained. Although they do not have an organized system set up for follow-up, provisions are made to accommodate any support needs presented to the organization. Andrea reflected:
It depends on the organization honestly. Most of the time, in every presentation, I always let people know that we are a resource, that we are available. Sometimes it depends on the individual who decides to take us up on that and call us and check in with us or ask us questions. Other times it might be a more formal or structured [situation] where they might want to check in with us in a couple of months, and we set that up. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 19)

Others share similar sentiments. Jessica noted the accessibility and willingness of the staff to follow up with their trainees:

We always let people know . . . that we’re always here as a resource. So if they have questions, if there are issues that they are running into, they can always call us or e-mail us. . . . It could be a conversation over the phone. We could schedule a lunch with them. Some people come in and want to meet with us one on one, and we do that. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 7)

Christie described some recent requests for follow-up by educators teaching media literacy for the first time:

I also think that a lot of times we’ll take phone calls. . . . Just recently, me and a couple of other staff members, have had questions from teachers who say, “Oh, this is my first time teaching media literacy. Do you have any recommendations?” And with the teachers, they are always limited, so anything that they can find for free I think is helpful. So I think it’s really important that we do continue to support the people who we train in media literacy. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 10)

Denis agreed with the others but noted the need for further work in this area:

There is [follow-up] in the sense that people stay in touch with us and often will call us for advice or suggestions or contacts. But frankly, I don’t think we do enough of that continuing support. I would like to see more of that. I have proposed this already to the organization, that we develop a set of services that we can provide to . . . graduates of the Catalyst Institute, to maintain an ongoing relationship . . . . We’re still working on that; we’re in a transition period right now with a new director. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 6)

Another means NMMLP employs in supporting its clients is its website. Christie, noting the importance of providing follow-up for their clients, said, “And I think we do that in several ways. One is our website. We offer a monthly deconstruction on that, and
just overall give information about what’s going on in media literacy, what our
organization is doing” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 10). She added:

Now we have curriculum materials you can download from our website. People have questions about the technical part like, for example, their computer didn’t play one of the clips right. . . . So when we can, we try to troubleshoot individually one-on-one with them over the phone and give them hints or try to walk them through how to correct problems they might be having with running the DVD, for example, on their computer. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 11)

Paula noted how the monthly electronic newsletter is used for trainee follow-up:

And the other thing that happens [is that], once we work with people, we give them the option to sign up for our monthly e-news, which is a monthly newsletter that comes out via e-mail [with] information about things we’re doing. One of our most popular sections on that is the monthly “Deconstruction,” where people break down ads . . . . And I think that e-communication works for many people. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 6)

Metaphors for NMMLP

The staff suggested several interesting metaphors to describe the mission and work of NMMLP. Omar, for example, compared NMMLP to a sponge:

The organization is like a sponge, and by a sponge I mean we’re ever increasingly absorbing influences, news, ideas, theories around us, incorporating them into what we do, and then like a sponge, when you are full, you squeeze the sponge and you release that into the sea, or the ocean, or whatever you may. You expunge that information. You can’t keep it all in the sponge, because if you keep it in the sponge, at some point the sponge becomes full, and the sponge no longer has use or function. So you have to every once in a while release the information that’s in the sponge, and that’s how I see the organization—like a sponge. We gain information; we release the information. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 7)

Jessica equated the work of NMMLP and other media literacy organizations to that of environmental agencies whose job it is to keep our beaches unpolluted:

NMMLP is like a beach, or even more, someone whose job it is to keep a beach clean. The waves symbolize the cycles society and the world go through, and the changes in media and technology. The cycles are constant; there are high tides and low tides. Media is a part of the ocean (society). The ocean is powerful. It can be scary and stormy. It can be beautiful. It can freeze and melt. People can swim or
drown or sail or cruise. The waves bring a variety of things to shore (more sand, rock, jellyfish, kelp, seaweed, dead sea life, and other natural things). The shore is our minds. Other times garbage is brought to shore, and, as more people pollute the ocean and media landscape, more trash washes up. Sometimes garbage from other countries travels across the vast ocean and pollutes the shore... NMMLP can only keep so much shoreline clean. We can’t take care of all the garbage, but we can keep some people from polluting the ocean and participating in pollution. We can remove some trash from the shore, but the trash often leaves behind traces. And, we aren’t the only ones cleaning up the beaches. There are others, but not enough to stop the pollution right now. Pollution might even be human nature, but it is also human nature to keep our world cleaner, safer, healthier, and more just. People lose their way in all the pollution, but we are there to show them the mess and suggest ways it can be cleaned up. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 8)

Paula created a metaphor to describe NMMLP’s responsiveness to trends in the media and media literacy:

I would say that it’s fluid. It’s responsive, and it moves. It’s not one particular thing. Many people go into a job, and everyday they know what they’re doing. We don’t always know what we are doing. We know what we’d like to get done. But we can have ten million different things happen that impact things. It can also be there’s something going on in the media like the recent New Yorker magazine cover where we’re thinking, “How do we deal with this? What do we have today?” So I think that there’s variety in that. But I really think it’s a fluid organization. We try to be responsive. Sometimes, because of our limiting factors, we’re not able to be as responsive as we like, but I do think it’s fluid. We try to respond. We’ve heard requests for [resources on] “body image” and “bullying,” so we are responding with that. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 8)
CHAPTER 5

THE STORY OF THE NEW MEXICO MEDIA

LITERACY PROJECT

Early Beginnings

In documenting the story of NMMLP, it was important to go back to its beginning. Through inquiries I made as I began to study this organization and its inception, I found that Deirdre (Dee Dee) Downs, the daughter of NBC-TV broadcast newscaster Hugh Downs, was its founder. The story you are about to read stems from a personal interview in which I asked her to tell me as much as she could remember about how this organization came into existence. Her story was an unusual and very interesting one—one that took an unexpected path.

Dee Dee grew up in a television broadcasting environment in New York City. Between the ages of 11 to 14, every day after school she would go down to 30 Rockefeller Plaza and spend time at the NBC television studio where her father worked. She stated, “All the NBC security guards knew me, and I had free run of the facility—every studio, every show, and almost every control room . . . were open to me. Believe me, you can learn a lot just by observing” (Vol. 6, section 1, p. 1). This privilege resulted in several unforgettable opportunities. She continued, “It’s how I got to meet Bobby Kennedy. It’s how I ended up on Dr. King’s lap. I just saw a lot, and so, when I grew
up, it was kind of a natural place for me. . . . I was so comfortable in it” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 1).

Dee Dee went on to tell more about her own family life. She said, “After graduating from high school, I moved to New Mexico, married, and had a child. Then, after a couple of years, I divorced, and that’s when I moved to L.A. to work in television. I spent the next eighteen years working my way up the TV and film-production ladder. I went into the business because it’s all that I knew” (Vol. 6, Section 1, p. 1).

After 18 years in the industry, she realized that she did not like the direction the media was going. She felt that the industry had lost its integrity—that the media was not fulfilling its mission of informing its audience but, instead, “gave into just being big business.” According to Dee Dee, at one time news departments were not expected to make money. However, that changed. She continued,

And the minute you turn news into a profit center, the tenor of news changes. The way they gather their information, the way they present their information, and the type of information they collect is very different by necessity because now they have to make money. (Vol. 5, Section 1, p. 2)

Therefore, she left television production to begin the next chapter in her life.

**Dee Dee Moves to Massachusetts**

It was at this time, after spending 18 years in television, that Dee Dee decided to move to Stockbridge, a small town in the western mountains of Massachusetts. She confessed that she did not know what she was going to do there until an idea crossed her mind that she should start teaching television production to high-school students. She felt this was needed “because there had been all the funding cuts, and . . . the public schools
had lost . . . their extra-curricular [activities] because there just wasn’t money in the budget” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 2).

Shortly after arriving in the Berkshires, during the 1990-91 school year, she began teaching at four different high schools in the area—Great Barrington, Pittsfield, Lee, and Lenox. She indicated, “I was going to teach straight TV production, but immediately saw the need for the students to understand the nature of the 'beast,' if you will; i.e., how mass media make us respond emotionally and influence our thoughts and decisions” (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 1).

She further explained:

I wrote out curricula and the four high schools all agreed to give the children full academic credit for my class, which met at my house after school hours 3 to 5 times a week depending on where we were in the production schedule. They were producing a spoof of news programming which aired in the spring of '91 on the local cable access channel. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 1)

Early on in the television production classes, she discovered that students were unaware of basic information related to the field. She said, “While we were making a TV show, I realized that they didn’t know the stuff that I took for granted, that I thought everybody knew” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 2). Therefore she rewrote her lesson plans and began to teach basic television production techniques. She used the example of an aspirin commercial to explain how producers use lighting to create special effects. She explained to them that when the lady with the severe headache came on the scene, lighting was used to make her look withdrawn and her face tired and worn. After taking the aspirin, she appears to feel better. Her countenance brightens, and she appears happier, thanks to the adjustment of the lighting. The students were amazed at her explanation.
She said to the students, “Kids, we have to back up here. Before we can even
start producing stuff, you need to understand what you’re doing and all the different
levels on which your message is going to be going out before you start producing” (Vol.
1, Section 1, p. 2). It was at this point that Dee Dee decided to develop her own
curriculum. She emphasized, “That was before I even knew that there was a media
literacy movement in the world” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 2).

Her work soon caught the attention of local media. Dee Dee later explained:

The largest newspaper in the area, The Berkshire Eagle, had previously published an
award winning article of mine about my trip with UNICEF to Ethiopia and the Sudan
and the famine and drought. The article was titled "An American in Purgatory." Because of that article, I had developed a relationship with the paper, and they did an
in-depth report on my work with the high schools. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 1)

Expanding the Vision

Her life took an interesting turn as the news of her work reached the media
literacy education world. According to Dee Dee, she received a call from Dr. Renée
Hobbs, who was at that time director of the Harvard University Institute on Media
Literacy. Hobbs had read the newspaper account of Dee Dee’s work in teaching high-
school television production. Dee Dee explained, “And so I got a call, and they were
asking about my curriculum, which I had completely done from scratch” (Vol. 1, Section
1, p. 3). She went on to say that Hobbs asked her if she knew that she was “recreating” a
new field of education and that the name of what she was doing was “media literacy.”
She added that Hobbs invited her to come and speak to her Ph.D. candidates at Harvard
for one of their assignments. She accepted the invitation.

However, after accepting the invitation, she began to reflect on the fact that she
did not even have an undergraduate degree. “And so as the time got closer for me to go
give this lecture, I called her, and I said, ‘You know what, I’m really sorry. Something’s come up. I can’t make it’” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 3). Hobbs’s response was that flyers had been distributed and many people were coming to listen to her presentation. Dee Dee then told Hobbs that if things changed, she would call her back.

Not long after this conversation Dee Dee received a call from her son asking her when she was going to Harvard to speak. This was the dialogue that took place:

And he said, “When are you supposed to go talk to Harvard?”
I said, “You know what, Honey, I canceled that.”
And he said, “Chicken.”
I said, “What?”
And he said, “You canceled because you’re scared.”
And I said, “Well. Oh. Oh, I guess maybe that is why.”
And so he said, “Call her back, and tell her you’ll do it.” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 3)

When asked what made her say no after she had made a commitment to speak, she replied:

Honestly, I don’t know what I thought. I guess I thought it was going to be a bunch of undergraduate students. But when I found out that it was a bunch of Ph.D.s, I went, “Oh! I don’t want to do that!” You know, I was intimidated. . . . My son was right. I was “chicken.” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 3)

After that conversation she declared, “Oh gosh! I’m so nervous,” but she called Hobbs who graciously said, “Oh, good. Glad you can make it” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 3).

Although she had decided to follow through with the presentation, according to Dee Dee, the “drive from Stockbridge to Cambridge was nerve racking” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 3).

The outcome of the meeting was quite encouraging.

The room was packed. (I was nervous as the proverbial long tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs!) But my presentation was well received. That was when I learned that the United States was lagging grossly behind other countries in media literacy, most notably Canada and Australia, as well as Great Britain. I believe those English speaking countries formed their media literacy movements to protect their children from the onslaught of American points-of-view flooding their own media outlets.
During this time, I read *Amusing Ourselves to Death* by Neil Postman, and *Manufacturing Consent* by Noam Chomsky. At that point I realized that our own country desperately needed a cohesive ML movement—not just the piece meal, disparate efforts being made up to that point. (Vol. 7, Section 1, pp. 1-2)

It was through this engagement that she connected with the media literacy community.

This visit to Harvard opened up a new world to Dee Dee. Her discoveries instilled within her a desire to make a difference in the field of media literacy. It was at this time that the idea of creating a non-profit media literacy organization in New Mexico was born.

**Laying the Foundation for the Kick-off of NMMLP**

Dee Dee pondered the steps she needed to pursue to create a media literacy organization:

I knew that a large, national effort would mean using the media itself... and would need a reputable and high profile name to push its agenda. So I explained the situation to my father and asked if he would lend his name to my efforts. Of course, he agreed. I applied for and received a 501c3 for the Downs Media Education Center (DMEC). (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 2)

The Downs Center had one specific mission—developing the national media literacy project which Dee Dee had envisioned. Since Hugh Downs was a nationally recognized newscaster, having the use of her father’s name added authenticity to her efforts. He agreed to be the chairman of the organization. She used his name to contact key individuals connected to the media literacy movement. The first person she contacted was Noam Chomsky, author and professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was able to give her guidance in the area of teaching young people media literacy.

The next person she contacted was Neil Postman, also an author and professor at New York University. She made an appointment to meet with Postman in New York to ask him if he would be the president of the new organization. In her words,
Next, I contacted the Chair of the Department of Communications at NYU, who just happened to be Neil Postman. We had our board of directors, mostly colleagues of mine and my Dad's from various forms of media: print, radio, film, and television, and advertising. When I first met with Neil, I asked him if he would be the President of the Downs Center (i.e. DMEC). He was very excited about the National Media Literacy Project and quickly agreed. We set up our first official board meeting a couple of weeks later at the offices of the editor of Parade Magazine, Walter Anderson, who was one of our board members. At that meeting we unanimously endorsed the mission statement that I had started and then polished with Neil. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 2)

Following the creation of the board, she filed for a 501c3, and a little money was raised. When asked about the responsibilities of the board, Dee Dee responded that she wanted to be able to use the names of its members to legitimize this newly created organization when trying to raise money. Initially Dee Dee’s father was not very involved in this venture. However, because people wanted to see and meet him as they attended the meetings, he agreed to make himself more available.

Dee Dee continued:

Anyway, DMEC was completely official in 1991, and I was still teaching in the Berkshires. Simultaneously, I was organizing the big launch of the National Media Literacy Project. I decided the best way to do that was to take a single state (in this case NM) and use it as a ‘flagship’ to show other states how to train and use catalyst teachers to make their own states media literate. New Mexico was chosen for several reasons: 1) I had lived there and knew my way around. 2) I had an introduction to the Dept. of Education. 3) It had a small population which should have made it easier to cover the entire state with Media Literacy. (Vol. 7, Section 1, pp. 2-3)

Another source of help appeared in New Mexico that solidified the decision to launch the Downs Media Education Center there:

I found out that KRQE in Albuquerque (the CBS affiliate) had a great little program called TV101. They provided public schools all over the state with video cameras and had them submit stories from their own communities from a teenager’s point-of-view. I met with the guy who ran the program, Chris Schuler, and we agreed that New Mexico would be the ideal state for the pilot program of the Downs Media Education Center. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 3)
The Downs Media Education Center eventually became known as the New Mexico Media Literacy Project.

An interesting experience occurred as a result of Dee Dee’s working relationship with Neil Postman. Postman asked Dee Dee if she would attend in his stead a media literacy conference to be held in Washington, D.C., at the internationally recognized Aspen Institute. He said that he preferred to send her to this conference rather than one of his colleagues. Now up to this point no one realized that she had not obtained an undergraduate degree. She felt quite out of place when she arrived in Aspen.

She declared, “So I get there, and I’m like the only one without a Ph.D. And we’re all sitting around, and it was interesting … because I wasn’t an educator. I was a TV producer” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 4). It was here that Dee Dee made her first presentation and introduced the idea of forming a national organization with the purpose of training teachers, who would in turn train other teachers.

Dee Dee’s next step was to go to New Mexico to ask for funding to launch a pilot project there. A state-wide conference was organized as a kick-off at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in March 1993. The turnout, according to Dee Dee, was outstanding. A number of people who worked in the media literacy field were flown in to this conference. She indicated that her dad was there, as well as U. S. Senator Jeff Bingaman. She reminisced:

After the school year ended in ’92, I was able to concentrate on producing the huge week long ML conference in Albuquerque. (I think it was at the Hilton.) The entire conference was being coordinated with the NM Department of Education who provided a great deal of ‘in kind’ financing, and funded all the NM teachers—their room, board, travel expenses, and stipends.) DMEC picked up the rest of the tab: paying all the ML experts like Deborah Leverantz from Texas, August Coppola and Kathleen Tyner from California. Also in attendance were Senator Jeff Bingaman and Governor King and the first lady. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 3)
Teachers from all over the state attended the conference. She estimated that between 50 to 100 teachers were there.

The objective of the conference was to have experts train the teachers with most of the training taking place in small groups. These teachers would then train other teachers in their schools throughout the state. However, the outcome was not exactly what she expected. “Unfortunately there were just a few teachers who then really became the trainers, and the original vision never happened” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 5). Instead, she organized a group of teachers who would teach media literacy through a single entity, the New Mexico Media Literacy Project. It had been Dee Dee’s objective to get this program set up and then turn it over to the teachers. Once again her plan did not go as smoothly as she had hoped.

After the conference Dee Dee’s work in the United States accelerated. She explained:

After the initial conference where we trained approximately 50 NM teachers from all over the state, I began a relentless travel schedule of speaking engagements around NM and the country. NYU, MIT, UNM, CSF, University of Georgia, and Bridgewater State College, and various Departments of Education in states like Connecticut, New York, Arizona, and Georgia.

Her work continued to flourish as other organizations caught the vision of a media literate society:

Late summer of 1993 I was contacted by the founders of the Taos Talking Picture Festival who had read many of the articles written about us all over NM. (I was a busy little bee!) And they felt that a ML component would be appropriate for their festival and would assist our efforts to make New Mexico the ‘first media literate state in America.’ Of course, I agreed and went to work drafting and organizing another week long conference, which was to premier the following year. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 4)

Dee Dee also interacted with organizations outside the United States interested in the work of the Downs Media Education Center. For example, she stated:
The enormous European media conglomerate Bertelsmann had a non-profit arm, appropriately named the Bertelsmann Foundation. I was contacted by their director, Ingrid Hamm, who wanted to study what the DMEC was doing in the US to use as a potential model for other nations. I (i.e., DMEC) was invited to their ML conference at the University of GA in Athens, Georgia, and we developed a personal friendship as well as a good working relationship. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 4)

She continued:

During the 1993-1994 school year, I was traveling to every corner of NM to meet with local school boards and various school principals to make them aware and explain what DMEC [was] trying to do—to make NM the first media literate state via the National Media Literacy Project. The concept was well received everywhere I went, and the school boards and principals were delighted that not one penny was coming out of their budget (because what I hadn't raised as a grant or by paid speaking engagements, was coming out of my personal pocket!! I was constantly told I was crazy to spend my own savings . . . but I truly believed the work was important.) (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 4)

Dee Dee’s efforts were noticed by media literacy organizations in Canada as well.

The Jesuit Communication Project’s Summer, 1994, online clipboard published the following account of the kick-off of what was then called “The National Media Literacy Project: Pilot State: New Mexico”:

In March, 1993, New Mexico launched the most extensive state-wide USA media literacy initiative. The National Media Literacy Project: Pilot State: New Mexico was developed by the Downs Media Education Center. This New Hampshire based organization is run by Hugh Downs, host of ABC’s 20/20, and his daughter Deirdre, a writer, educator and television producer.

The project organizers who have the strong support of the New Mexico state department of education used the March gathering to bring together some of the top USA media educators to help plan strategies for developing media literacy in New Mexico.

By February, 1994, media literacy was well entrenched in many New Mexico schools. Teachers are eager to take part in the state-wide program and parents have also been involved in home media literacy programs. The mayor of Las Cruces declared April 8, 1994, Media Literacy day. Teachers and principals are being trained by the Downs Center in many New Mexico cities. (Pungente, 1994)

In 1994 Dee Dee organized the first week-long media literacy conference during the Taos Talking Picture Festival in Taos, New Mexico. She reflected:
I had worked hard to produce an exciting conference, and on the first day I moderated a panel debate that was simulcast across New Mexico through Public Radio. One of the people I invited to sit on the panel was Adam Clayton Powell (either the 3rd or 4th . . . all the brothers have the same name, and were named after their famous—and infamous—Congressman father). (Vol. 7, Section 1, pp. 4-5)

Organizers of the Taos Talking Picture Festival suggested adding a media literacy component to the annual film festival in Taos. According to Dee Dee, “That became a centralized location for teachers to come and be trained, which was great. It was really nice for me because that was money I didn’t have to come out of my pocket” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 5).

It was at this conference that Dee Dee first met Bob McCannon, media education teacher at Albuquerque Academy, Albuquerque, New Mexico, who would succeed her as director of the National Media Literacy Project. She indicated:

The first time I met Bob McCannon was at this event. . . . He approached me and told me about his work at the Academy. . . . Bob invited me to the Academy . . . and when I first drove on to their campus, I was utterly astonished at the infrastructure and affluence. Bob asked if he could stay in touch and, of course, I said yes. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 5)

Dee Dee began to realize that she needed assistance with the management of this national media project. She continued:

The Taos Picture Festival did well enough that I asked if they could hire me an assistant for the following year since I was incredibly swamped running DMEC. They found a great kid who was smart and energetic, and I was able to delegate a lot to him. I recommended Bob to them because Bob had made it clear (repeatedly) that he wanted to do whatever he could with the NM project. I was thrilled by his eagerness because the whole point of the project was to turn it over to NM teachers . . . thus the term "catalyst." They were meant to take the ball and run with it. Bob wanted to run. Great! (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 5)

The media literacy movement in New Mexico continued to grow. According to Dee Dee:
By the end of 1994 the city of Las Cruces had not only declared a Media Literacy Day (which was celebrated with city wide events and media literacy games and booths in the largest shopping mall), but later that year the Governor declared Las Cruces to be the first Media Literate City in the state due to the fact that the mayor had required media literacy taught in every single school in the metropolitan area. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 5)

However, the responsibilities of nurturing a new organization began to take their toll on Dee Dee. Although funds had also come from others for this project, Dee Dee indicated that she had invested a sizeable amount of her own resources into what was now NMMLP. She stated, “Although I was great at writing curricula and producing conferences, and speaking in public, I [was unsuccessful] at raising grant money. . . . And my personal savings account and other liquidated assets were gone” (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 6).

Amid these concerns about her ability to nurture the project, Dee Dee was experiencing at this time both physical and emotional stress from these work-related issues. “I was in the hospital for two weeks,” she said. “When I got out, I put my Santa Fe house up for sale and bought some bare land out in the country and put a trailer on it, because that's all I could afford” (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 6).

Sensitive to issues regarding its funding and desiring to safeguard its mission, Dee Dee was running out of money and needed help to move the work of NMMLP forward. She was ready to transfer the responsibilities of the project to an entity that could nurture it. Realizing that Albuquerque Academy had endowment money for work such as NMMLP, she approached Bob McCannon. She believed that if McCannon agreed to take on the leadership of the organization, the money would also be available from the Academy to run it. She stated:

I met Bob, and I said, ‘Look, here is the situation. I need to go back to work. I’m broke, but I don’t want this to die, and you seem very interested in continuing it. I
can’t give you any money, but if you want it, I’ll give you everything I have, and you can keep going with it if you promise that you will.’ And he said he would. (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 5)

According to Dee Dee, NMMLP

was well and truly rolling. . . . It was world famous . . . and very successful. All they had to do was keep it going. They understood that there really was no money, but the Head Master was so thrilled to have the project that he promised to fund it for as long as Bob needed. (Vol. 7, Section 1, p. 6)

Change in Leadership for NMMLP

I contacted Bob McCannon to get his perspective on the history of NMMLP. Bob’s enthusiasm and distinctive interests in educational excellence made it possible for him to offer NMMLP the very best in leadership. He had been teaching media education at Albuquerque Academy for over 20 years (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 1) and had established a track record in teaching excellence well before 1993, the year he took over the leadership of NMMLP. This track record encouraged the Board of Albuquerque Academy to take on the responsibility of supporting the media literacy project. Bob stated:

I had been teaching around the state because I had been president of the New Mexico Council for the Social Studies for three years and had been working with the council for a number of years before that. That plus the fact that I was the coordinator of technology at the Academy. (Vol. 7, p. 5)

While teaching at Albuquerque Academy, Bob had stayed abreast of current technology. He said, “The first digitizing board that came out was the one that came out for the Macintosh Quadra, and it cost 5,000 bucks. I know; I bought it” (Vol. 7, p. 5). However, he not only invested in the latest technology, but he also integrated it in his classroom teaching. He said, “I was the second person in the country to teach history with technology, and I did it with HyperCard. . . . We were only the second school in the country that was doing that” (Vol. 7, p. 5).
I asked Bob how he had developed his interest in technology. He responded, 

I’ve always wanted to make teaching better. I was a great natural teacher, and I recognized early on that it was my personality . . . my charisma, that made me a great teacher. . . . My work with the New Mexico Council for the Social Studies took me into lots of Social Studies classrooms, and so I did a Masters degree. . . . The thesis was based around the idea of how can we make the teaching of Social Studies better. (Vol. 7, p. 5)

Describing the research behind his thesis, Bob continued,

I looked at all the reviews, and I looked at all the suggestions people were making. I put forward the thesis that what we needed was to get away from the passive processing and the abstract perceiving model which is where all schools are. Even the current research indicates that even schools that say that they’re doing active education . . . are not really doing active education. (Vol. 7, p. 6)

In order to integrate “active education” into his classroom and encourage learner involvement, he stated, “I tried to come up with something, and I figured that, by using computers, that kids would be . . . freed for certain discreet periods of time from the ‘teacher talking, and them having to listen’ form of learning” (Vol. 7, p. 6). Bob concluded, “That’s where my interest came from, to make teaching better, [but] I finally began to realize that it wasn’t just bad teaching that was keeping kids from learning. It was the culture they were growing up in” (Vol. 7, p. 6). This eventually led to his interest in media literacy education. He declared,

It became clear to me sometime around the turn of the decade, 80’s to 90’s, that what we really needed to do was point out to parents that the culture their kids were immersed in was a serious problem. Using the TV for a baby-sitter was a serious problem. And, oh, by the way, it’s a serious problem for democracy, it’s a serious problem for addiction. (Vol. 7, p. 6)

Bob explained that Dee Dee had used a classroom in the Academy to conduct a training of teachers interested in media literacy. She named the session “The Catalyst,” and the objective was to make it a “train the trainers” workshop. The participants were
to “go back out in the communities and spread media education” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 1). About 15 people attended that meeting.

Dee Dee then hired a woman to help her on a part-time basis to assist on the day-to-day business operation. She took two or three “catalysts” to a conference at Harvard which he himself attended as well. It was during this conference that he became better acquainted with her. Shortly thereafter Dee Dee approached him with a proposal asking if Albuquerque Academy would be interested in subsidizing the project under his leadership. Bob was well suited for this work since he was already promoting media literacy in the area.

After reviewing her proposal, Bob approached the Board of Trustees of Albuquerque Academy under the leadership of Robert Bovinette, the headmaster. According to Bob, the Board felt “it would be a good public/private participation project, a good outreach project for a private school like Albuquerque Academy which has a tremendous amount of money and is often seen as insular and a bunch of rich kids” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 2). Taking on NMMLP would thus benefit both the community and Albuquerque Academy.

Bob began to direct the organization on a part-time basis in 1993. He noted, 

By working seven days/week, developing and selling innovative and effective curricula . . . NMMLP became a leader in the media literacy field. . . . It is a set of skills and a methodology which can be applied to every medium of communication. (Vol. 6, Section 2, p. 1)

Over the next 13 years, Bob subsequently played a major role in the development of NMMLP. The resources he developed helped place the organization on a sound financial footing. Over 10,000 copies of the CD-ROM, Understanding Media, for example, were sold (Vol. 7, p. 2). This CD-ROM, according to Bob, “established the
basic ‘tools’ of deconstruction and the primary ‘issues’ of . . . media literacy, which they use to this day” (Vol. 7, p. 2).

Bob organized conferences and training programs to “train students, teachers, parents, administrators, community and civic leaders, members of the media” (Vol. 7, p. 1). The first of these conferences, “Teaching around Television,” was held October 20-23, 1994, at Albuquerque Academy. Three hundred people from all over the world came to converse “with each other and twenty-two of the top experts in the fields [of] media and education” (Vol. 7, p. 1). These included Wally Bowen, Renate and Geoffrey Caine, Brandon Cenlenwall, Gloria DeGaetano, Deirdre Downs, Hugh Downs, Jane Healy, Charles Johnston, Jean Kilbourne, Robert Kubey, Bill McKibben, Kathryn Montgomery, Kate Moody, Robyn Quin, Godfrey Reggio, Dorothy and Jerome Singer, Elizabeth Thoman, and Kathleen Tyner. According to Bob, “This was easily the most impressive media [education] conference yet brought together, and, possibly, to date” (Vol. 7, p. 1).

Bob conducted dozens of workshops for the American Academy of Pediatrics as well as in eight or nine countries (Vol. 5, Section 2, p. 3). Remuneration for his services ranged from nothing for non-profit organizations to $3,000 per day for major organizations. In addition to this, he donated his honorarium from the Academy to the Project, amounting to over $500,000, the entire time he worked there. During his tenure as director, “over a million dollars in grants” was received (Vol. 6, Section 2, p. 1).

The demand for workshops and training, presentations, and resources grew, and Bob stopped teaching at the Academy to become full-time director of NMMLP. He hired an assistant and then “a couple more people” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 2). During the 13 years of his tenure, he said, “About twenty came and went with a staff of seven by the
time I left—presenters, curricula designers, receptionists, bookkeepers, etc.” (Vol. 5, Section 2, p. 3).

As the organization grew, more educational materials were produced, such as CD-ROMs. The sale of these materials, along with the honorarium, was supplemented by “in kind and actual” financial support from Albuquerque Academy, such as “salaries before NMMLP became self-supporting, office [space], overhead, computers, phone, etc.” (Vol. 5, Section 2, p. 3).

In summary, Bob concluded:

NMMLP [became] the most successful media literacy project in the country. I developed . . . best selling media literacy resources (CD-ROMs). . . . I conducted ground breaking successful research and designed the interventions that made the studies so successful. When I retired from NMMLP in 2006, it had seven employees, high sales and $800,000 in cash reserves. . . . Between 1993 and 2006, over 1,060 volunteers took NMMLP's intensive four-day NMMLP “catalyst” workshops (limited to thirty attendees). They were conducted in New Mexico and other states, and . . . I taught the majority of these seminars by myself. Those attendees include the founders of dozens of successful media literacy organizations. (Vol. 6, Section 2, p. 1)

By the time of his retirement, according to Bob, NMMLP “was well under way and financially well-established and had a tremendous national reputation” (Vol. 7, p. 4).

Bob decided to retire after devoting 13 years to the Project. He said that when he tendered his resignation, the Academy “gave me a sabbatical, a year-long sabbatical, as a sort of a thank you for all the effort—especially for all the summers I had spent working” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 2). He enumerated the reasons he decided to retire: “Quite frankly one of the reasons that I decided to retire from the Project was it had become [entailed] a lot of traveling. . . . There were years when I charged seventy hotels on my project credit card” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 2). He added, “I was a great teacher and presenter; being an administrator of an organization with seven employees was something for which I had no
training and little patience. The traveling got very, very old” (Vol. 5, Section 2, p. 4).

Besides, “I had been teaching in that particular school for over thirty years, and I decided that it was time to do something else” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 2).

According to Bob, changing the media system requires political activism and this was not possible with the State grants NMMLP was receiving. However, because of the passion he had developed for the field of media education, he co-founded what is now a national organization, Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME), in 2002. ACME was to be independent of media and corporate money because, according to Bob,

much media literacy education is actually funded directly or indirectly by the media, and therefore, it cannot really take on some of the issues that really need to be taken on when it comes to reforming a media that is based upon a kind of corporation system, which is fundamentally corrupt. (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 3)

In launching ACME, Bob employed his ingenuity by inviting highly acclaimed individuals in the field of media education, including founding coalition members Wally Bowen of Citizens for Media Literacy, Jacques Brodeur of EDUPAC, Aliza Dihter of Media Channel, Tom Gardner of Media Education Foundation, author Lt. Dave Grossman, Carl Jensen of Project Censored, Sut Jhally of Media Education Foundation, author Jean Kilbourne, author and Free Press founder, Robert McChesney, Jim Metrock of Obligation, Inc., Lisa Miller of the American Academy of Pediatrics, author Mark Crispin Miller, Gary Ruskin of Commercial Alert, Frank Vespe of TV-Turnoff, and author Neil Postman. Such a wide-ranged networking approach continues to place Bob’s work in the forefront of the media literacy arena. ACME is nationally recognized as a resource for media literacy training.

While director of NMMLP, Bob had conducted a series of unique research studies measuring student, parent, and teacher outcomes to better serve students in New Mexico.
He notes that he was asked to write the chapter on “Media Literacy Effectiveness” in the second edition of the college text, *Children, Adolescents, and the Media*. According to Bob, this was “the first comprehensive review of the literature on media education, covering more than a hundred published studies, including those of NMMLP” (Vol. 7, p. 3). In 2008 Bob was selected “Media Educator of the Year” by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

**The Mission of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project**

The mission of NMMLP has evolved since its inception. Several mission statements describing its purpose and mission have been published. During Dee Dee’s tenure, the mission of the Downs Media Education Center, the organization which became NMMLP, was to create a media literate society within the United States. As she noted,

Yes, the National Media Literacy Project was the work in which the DMEC was engaged. It was, in fact, the only work in which we were engaged. DMEC was the 501-c3 set up for the sole purpose of implementing the National Media Literacy Project. DMEC intended New Mexico to serve as an example to other states about how to become media literate. The work was never meant to be limited to New Mexico.

The proper name for the work in New Mexico was: The National Media Literacy Project: Pilot State New Mexico; but a few folks found it easier to shorten it to the NMMLP. I never bothered to correct anyone, although I stuck to the original ‘National Media Literacy Project’ whenever I spoke about our work. It was more accurate, since the DMEC mission statement was clear that our work was meant to be national in scope. Some of the people in the NM State Dep't of Education began calling it NMMLP about a year after we started our work there. (Vol. 8, pp. 2-3)

When Bob McCannon was asked about the mission of NMMLP during his tenure, he indicated that he expanded on Dee Dee’s original vision. I contacted Andrea Quijada, the current Executive Director, who sent me a document described as the “Old Mission Statement” submitted to the 1998 and 1999 State legislature (Vol. 8, Section 1, p. 2). She
also attached a document described as an “old vision statement.” These documents are reprinted below.

Mission Statement

The New Mexico Media Literacy Project wants to remain the most successful grassroots media literacy project in the United States. We are committed to activating ever wiser media consumers—that is, those who continually grow in their ability to analyze, access, and produce media.

By working with a wide array of public institutions—such as schools, libraries, hospitals, churches and many other organizations, we strive to educate the students, teachers, parents and citizens of the country.

Our aim is to showcase positive examples of media and to inform the country of the addictive and deceptive practices as well.

We teach people to value dispassionate and complex communication and devalue aggressive, simplistic, and emotional messages, programs, movies, advertisements and entertainment.

We try to create more reflective, less addicted, less violent children. We stand for democracy, better parenting practices and thoughtful lifestyles. We seek to minimize compulsive and reactive cognition.

Eventually, we hope to convince the media conglomerates of the world to produce better quality media and advertisements.

We also hope to communicate the idea that technology, when used properly, can be a beneficial tool that enables all stories to be told and appreciated, not just those of the majority and the wealthy, and not just the violent, sexual and stimulating.

Finally, we want to promote democracy through citizen and parent activism by eroding corporate censorship and passive consumption of the media.

*As submitted to the 1998 and 1999 New Mexico legislatures (Vol. 8, Section 1, p. 2).

Vision Statement

The New Mexico Media Literacy Project wants to remain the most successful grassroots media literacy project in the United States. We are committed to activating ever wiser media consumers—that is, those who continually grow in their ability to analyze, access, and produce media.

By working with a wide array of public institutions—such as schools, libraries, hospitals, churches and many other organizations, we strive to educate the students, teachers, parents and citizens of the country.

Our aim is to showcase positive examples of media and to inform the country of the addictive and deceptive practices as well.
We teach people to value dispassionate and complex communication and devalue aggressive, simplistic, and emotional messages, programs, movies, advertisers and entertainment.

We try to create more reflective, less addicted, less violent children. We stand for democracy, better parenting practices and thoughtful lifestyles. We seek to minimize compulsive and reactive cognition.

Eventually, we hope to convince the media conglomerates of the world to produce better quality media and advertisements.

We also hope to communicate the idea that technology, when used properly, can be a beneficial tool that enables all stories to be told and appreciated, not just the violent, sexual and stimulating.

Finally, we want to promote democracy and citizen activism by eroding corporate censorship and passive consumption of the media. (Vol. 8, Section 1, p. 3)

Andrea also submitted a third document called “About NMMLP—Our Mission,” which she indicated was “the mission statement that NMMLP used to hand out many years ago” (Vol. 8, Section 1, pp. 4-5).

About NMMLP | Our Mission

We aim to lead a cultural revolution, a revolution concerned about the health of our children and our democracy.

As our founder, veteran newscaster Hugh Downs, once said, ‘We must educate people to desire better media. That is the only way we will have better media.’ Our goals are to make New Mexico the most media literate state in the United States, and to spread the NMMLP model of grassroots, action-oriented media literacy education to other states.

We believe that the global media corporations have joined the Dark Side. Their TV programming, their movies, their magazines and billboards and video games—and most notably the advertising that pays for it all—have become nonstop promotional campaigns for compulsive and addictive consumer lifestyles. Even worse, they’re targeting the most vulnerable among us: our children. From an early age, kids are subjected to a multimedia barrage designed to persuade them to eat non-nutritious, highly-processed McFood loaded with fat and sugar; to smoke and drink like their favorite stars without a thought about the consequences; to view relationships as vehicles for self-gratification rather than mutuality and caring; to use violence to resolve their problems; and above all, to buy their way to happiness. This is a formula for disaster.

Further, the global media corporations’ money and influence, particularly their public relations efforts, lobbying and campaign contributions, threaten to undermine our democratic system. They have become the world's biggest censors, controlling the information that reaches the average person, framing political debates, and consigning alternative views to the shadowy margins of public discourse. One
example: According to Senator John McCain, Bob Dole, Jesse Jackson, Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader (quite a group to agree, eh?), the 1996 Telecommunications Act—which gave away parts of the digital spectrum instead of auctioning them off—amounted to a $75 billion ‘gift’ from US taxpayers to Big Media. (That amount, by the way, could have paid for extending comprehensive health care coverage to every man, woman and child in the United States for two years.) Did you know about this huge boondoggle? Probably not, if like most Americans you get your information from TV news. The evening news programs chose NOT to tell America about the government’s digital spectrum giveaway because the corporations that own the news shows were the beneficiaries. There are countless examples of this type of censorship at work.

Now Big Media is even buying media literacy experts and organizations. When AOL Time Warner, Channel One, Cable in the Classroom, Discovery Channel and Bravo line up to support media literacy, it’s time to ask questions: How do they define media literacy? Do they support criticism, or merely interpretation? Will they encourage people to look ‘behind the screens’ to examine issues of media ownership and control? Is their interest a sincere effort to protect and educate children, or a PR campaign to soften Big Media’s public image and curry favor with its critics. We think the emerging phenomenon of corporate funding of ‘media literacy’ is a problem for the media literacy movement, its credibility, and its ability to achieve meaningful impact.

Media literacy—the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce messages using verbal and visual symbols—has become an essential skill in today’s media-saturated world. Whether you’re concerned about the marketing of tobacco and alcohol to children, the lack of news in TV ‘news,’ or the nonstop promotion of compulsive and addictive consumer lifestyles, media literacy offers important tools for analysis and action.

Come, join the media literacy revolution! (Vol. 8, Section 1, pp. 4-5)

The current mission statement, according to Andrea, is displayed on the organization’s website. It is, “The New Mexico Media Literacy Project cultivates critical thinking and activism in our media culture to build healthy and just communities” (Vol. 3, Section 1, p. 1).

The Evolution of NMMLP

Successes and Challenges

Every organization encounters successes and challenges in its work. Omar and Denis shared some of their thoughts on NMMLP’s successes. According to Omar:
The successes, I think, are any time that we can leave a room and know that we’ve had a positive influence on students, on adults, on professionals. The most successful moment that we have as an organization is when we know that we have provided the motive or the inspiration for someone to go out into [his or her] own school, . . . community, . . . home, and provide and spread that information. Those are the successful moments. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 6)

He continued:

The successful moments are when we train five thousand people, but, the truth be told, it’s that one person that makes the difference. It’s that one person that goes back into his community, or her community, and makes a difference. It’s the one mother or father [who] goes back . . . home [to] influence [his or her] children, and it’s those children then that make the difference. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 6)

Denis spoke of Dee Dee Downs’s goal of creating not just NMMLP but similar organizations all over the country. He continued, “And while it didn’t happen exactly that way, this organization has been very important in spreading the idea of media literacy and a model for doing media literacy all over the country and abroad as well” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 3). He noted the many people who have attended the Catalyst Institute, received training, and who have returned to their communities to start media literacy projects. It “could be just in their school, could be in their town; some of them have created statewide projects that are doing similar things” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 3).

Jessica noted NMMLP’s success not only in training people to be media activists in their communities, but also in attracting financial support for the organization:

Success [is shown by] how many people request our trainings [and] are coming back and [by] how many people are purchasing our resources and tell us that they enjoy using them and that they’re working in their communities. And so it goes beyond just what we’re doing because our resources are out there, and they’re spreading. People come to these trainings, and then they’re going out and they’re doing their own media literacy work. It just spreads from there. And also new funders [are] getting involved, too. So that also shows success because there [are] new funders we’ve never had before that are wanting to invest in us because of our reputation, because they’ve heard so many good stories about our project. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 6)
Paula, commenting on the success of NMMLP’s “Catalyst Institute,” said, “I think that that’s something people enjoy coming to. I think they learn from it. I will also say it is now being copied around the country in a variety of different formats” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 7). She also noted the success of their products:

We’re in a place where we really understand our focus is on healthy and just communities. So in our products we’re trying to address that. We’re making sure that we’re not showing all white women or all white men, that we are including people of color and that we’re doing it in ways that are appropriate . . . that we’re working hard to not be part of the oppression that can occur. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 7)

Teamwork was a success noted by Paula. She explained, “And I think that’s a success because you can do anything when you have a staff of talented, hardworking people” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 7). She went on to note that the team members sometimes share their points of view in “spirited” discussions; however, in spite of differences of opinion, they work hard to reach a consensus. She concluded, “We don’t always agree on everything … but I think that we really do work to come together” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 7).

Christie summarized NMMLP’s successes in this way,

I think we’re successful, and I think what we do, we do it well. We have respect from the communities we work with, and the people who purchase our products, and the participants in our trainings, the students we work with in classrooms, for example. So I would say, yes, I think we’ve been successful, and we’re continuing to build on that success. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 7)

Challenges, like successes, are experienced by every organization involved with change. When asked about the challenges the staff at NMMLP have encountered, Omar referred to the constantly changing nature of the field of media literacy:

Well, [our] challenges are always [pertaining to] how to stay ahead of the curve … how to stay ahead of this ever changing lens because . . . if you stand back for even a second, things change so rapidly and so monumentally around you, that it becomes hard to catch up. So it is the effort of continuing to stay on the forefront of the
landscape, in the ever changing landscape of media/media literacy, and knowing that increasingly other issues now become connected with media literacy, issues like net neutrality, issues like media justice, social justice, race and representation. These . . . issues now become part of media literacy, and they affect how you train, how you present, [and] the resources that you produce. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 5)

Jessica described the challenges NMMLP faces in confronting the media system as a whole:

There are lots of challenges . . . . We’re fighting a media system . . . and . . . people in the media system that are producing media that we are trying to deconstruct because we’re trying to get people to see through the messages. But there’s thousands and thousands of people involved . . . and money involved, too. So we’re one non-profit, and we’re trying to monitor and deconstruct these millions of media messages that we’re exposed to every day. So the media system being bigger and more powerful than we are is a challenge. I think the invasiveness of all of the media is a challenge because we can’t keep up with everything. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 4)

She continued,

And because we don’t have just one focus—we have a framework, but we don’t just look at news and politics. We don’t just look at health issues, so to try to keep up with all these different topics in the media is also a challenge. And . . . the technology changes, too. Because, as we’re trying to keep up with the media, we’re also trying to keep up with the technology. And a lot of us don’t have that training. A lot of the software we use, we have to teach ourselves how to use. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 4)

Omar summarized the challenge of keeping abreast with change in this way:

You know the media literacy movement of fifteen years ago is not the media literacy movement of now. They may share many same basic principles, but the audience that we serve now is different and ever changing, ever changing. It’s one of the only fields from a personal level that I’ve ever worked on that’s like that. It changes so quickly. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 5)

Jessica noted that another challenge the staff faces is the resistance sometimes encountered during training programs when they are deconstructing advertisements.

And being that we’re fighting, trying to analyze and deconstruct all these messages and evaluate them, it’s really hard because sometimes there’s resistance with people. They don’t want to deconstruct it because it’s just, “Oh, why is it so bad . . . ?"
Sometimes there [are] some arguments that come along, and it’s hard to get [through to] people because they’ve been so desensitized with all of this media. (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 4)

Andrea felt there were challenges early on in the organization due to the lack of a succinct mission statement. According to Andrea, it was hard to seek funding without a clear mission statement, for example. She noted, however, that the collective process of creating the current mission statement, “To cultivate critical thinking and activism in our media culture to create healthy and just communities,” though a good thing, presented a new challenge—getting everyone to agree on its interpretation. A training program was set up to help staff members understand the implications of the mission statement and to clarify the responsibilities of each staff member (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 11).

Frequent changes in leadership have been a challenge for NMMLP according to Christie. She pointed out that there had been four different directors in the 5 years she had been with the organization. A change in leadership was just occurring at the time of these interviews during the summer of 2008.

Goals

According to Denis, the original goal of NMMLP, to be a pilot project for the creation of a nationwide network of media literacy organizations, has been reached, although possibly not in the way originally intended by its founders. Denis, referring to Dee Dee’s goal for the project, stated:

Well, I mentioned that Deirdre Downs’ goal was to create not just a New Mexico Media Literacy Project but also similar ones all over the country. And while it didn’t happen exactly that way, this organization has been very important in spreading the idea of media literacy and a model for doing media literacy all over the country and abroad as well. . . . So I think we have achieved Deirdre Downs’ goal even though those organizations were not all tied together in one big organization. For example, we don’t have those institutional ties, but I think we did plant many seeds that have
grown and blossomed into a lot of media literacy work around the country. That’s I think our biggest success, I would say. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 3)

He continued, “That was one of the original goals, and I think we met that and continue to do that as we continue to train people from different communities and different approaches and spread that model of activism” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 3). Jessica declared, “Yes, we’re succeeding teaching people media literacy” (Vol. 1, Section 7, p. 6).

“Yes, I think on a daily basis we meet our goal,” Omar commented. “I think every day we can say on some level that we provide that inspiration or motivation for someone to provide change, to provide information in their sphere of influence” (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 7).

Other Goals

NMMLP’s goals are in the process of changing, reflecting the changing nature of media literacy itself. Andrea reflected:

Well, some of them have shifted. . . . We are about to embark on a new set of goals. . . . We’re starting to use a different framework. We’re starting to talk about media justice. So I feel like we’re going to have a whole new set of goals to build on where we’ve come from. I feel like we have a really solid foundation in media literacy. I feel like we’ve established ourselves in the country as an organization that people go to that, that people learn from. So we’re definitely well-established that way in terms of creating a local base and actually starting to address policy issues and address media justice and injustice. I think people don’t want to hear about the injustice in media, and that’s really what we’re more and more interested in right now, and more and more trying to do something about, and not just point it out. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 15)

Paula spoke about the importance of NMMLP becoming involved in media justice, a movement enabling the voice of the masses to be heard in the media. According to the media justice organization, Reclaim the Media, the work of the media justice movement is “pursuing a more just society by transforming our media system and
expanding the communication rights of ordinary people through grassroots organizing, education, networking and advocacy” (Reclaim the Media, 2010, What We Do, ¶ 1). It was for this reason that NMMLP joined Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net), which, according to Denis, is “an emerging national network of local and regional groups” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 4). According to its website, MAG-Net “is a local-to-local advocacy network of grassroots social justice, media, and cultural organizations working together . . . for social change through the critical use and transformation of media and communications systems” (Media Action Grassroots Network, 2010).

Andrea acknowledged,

We’re part of a network now. We’re collaborating with local organizations, but we’re also part of this larger picture whereby we want to influence both local and national media policy. That’s something we hadn’t done before as an organization. Before, our emphasis was primarily on education and getting people to think critically. We wanted people to do activist work, but we weren’t necessarily doing it ourselves outside of the educational component. This could be considered a piece of activism also, but we’re taking a more active role in looking at policy. (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 17)

She explained how NMMLP was collaborating with MAG-Net to launch a digital television educational campaign, saying, “We’re launching that in October in conjunction with MAG-Net because . . . all the organizations that are a part of MAG-Net are all doing this together” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 17).

Denis, speaking of NMMLP’s involvement in MAG-Net, indicated NMMLP’s interest in the media justice movement had been growing the past few years. He explained,

That work is just beginning, but it will involve some change in what we do and how we do it that I think is a good positive change and is a sign of growth in the field. It’s a new effort, and I think it’s something that we will be devoting more resources to. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 4)
Omar spoke of the fluidity of NMMLP’s goals in continuing to be proactive and intentional as they look at the changing needs of the general public. He delineated his thoughts by saying,

I think we always have goals of expanding our understanding of the general public, our understanding of what their wants and needs are. So, yes, with the changes in what people want, what people need, I think that we have to be responsive to that, and we have to alter the way that we provide information so that it doesn’t become stagnant, that it’s always fresh, that it’s always new; that it’s always relevant so that people continue to take an interest in it. (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 7)

Paula concluded by noting that NMMLP’s goal is to continue to develop resources that can be used by today’s consumers and make them readily available and accessible to all. Examples of such resources are the DVD-ROMs with a large-print option and closed captioning (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 7).

Summary

NMMLP was founded in 1993 by Hugh Downs and his daughter Deirdre Downs and built into a nationally recognized media literacy organization under the direction of Bob McCannon. NMMLP is now “one of the largest and most successful media literacy organizations in the United States” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project [NMMLP], 2008). It is currently located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on the campus of Albuquerque Academy, supported by the Academy as well as the state of New Mexico. According to information derived from an April 2004 archive, this organization “uses state-of-the-art multimedia, CD-ROMs, and videos to illustrate major skills and issues in media literacy.” Their website states that NMMLP delivers dynamic multimedia presentations at conferences, workshops, and classrooms across the county, and its action guides, DVD-ROMs, CD-ROMs, and videos are used in all 50 states and
abroad. NMMLP’s programs have empowered thousands of people to be advocates and activists for a media literate society (NMMLP, 2010a).

The organization has presenters who are available to speak in schools, professional organizations, places of worship, and community groups. They give media literacy presentations to thousands of K-12 students each year. NMMLP provides training in media literacy concepts and skills to teachers, counselors, and health professionals each year. Its training programs are customized to meet the needs of the recipients. For example, they offer 2-hour workshops, teacher in-service training, and a 4-day Catalyst Institute. Some of NMMLP’s presentation topics include: Media Literacy for Youth, Media and Gender Stereotypes, Media and Healthy Relationships, Media and Health, Media Literacy for Tobacco Prevention, Media and Bullying, Media and Domestic Violence, Latinos and Media, and Native American Images in Media.

The goal of NMMLP is to help people learn how to apply media literacy in all walks of life: “Once you’ve mastered the basics, you can use media literacy in your work—in the classroom, in your job, or in your community” (NMMLP, 2010c, ¶ 1). This organization also helps individuals learn how to teach or train others. “We show you how to deliver presentations. . . . And we demonstrate hands-on activities you can use with your family and friends, your students, and your colleagues” (NMMLP, 2010c, ¶ 2). Overall, Andrea stated that one of the goals of NMMLP is for people to take action. The organization wants to help people and the community use media literacy in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways.

One of NMMLP’s most popular training programs is its intensive 4-day Catalyst Institute. This institute provides workshops, exercises, video screenings, and discussions
that deepen an individual’s understanding of media issues and provides a solid foundation for media activism.

NMMLP (2010f) creates custom curricula for schools, educators, and various organizations to be used in classrooms, conferences, workshops, and public presentations. It asserts:

Our comprehensive curricula combine media examples (video and audio clips from television, radio and movies, images from magazine ads, etc.) with written materials such as lesson plans, discussion guides, deconstructions, fact sheets and handouts. We can create a custom curriculum on virtually any media literacy issue of your choice. (Custom curricula, ¶ 2)

NMMLP and its focus on narrowing the gap between the agitation for media literacy education and the failure of schools to do so has given birth to new initiatives. Thousands of people have learned media literacy skills and are applying them in different settings. NMMLP takes media literacy issues to the classroom, making it possible for young people to become critical thinkers in a media-saturated society. The study of the birth and subsequent development of NMMLP has shed much light on my understanding of media literacy education initiatives.
CHAPTER 6

THE NEW MEXICO MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

CATALYST INSTITUTE

Introduction

NMMLP’s Catalyst Institute is a 4-day training session open to anyone interested in learning media literacy skills. Its goal is to help each attendee understand how media messages create meaning, identify the authors of media messages, and recognize what they want the viewers to believe or do. Attendees learn to recognize bias, spin, misinformation, and lies often found in media presentations. The sessions also help attendees discover the part of the story that is not told and learn to evaluate media messages based on personal experiences, beliefs, and values. Above all, the Catalyst Institute attempts to prepare attendees to become advocates for change in the media system. This chapter gives readers and future practitioners a glimpse into a typical media literacy education program.

Catalyst Institute

The Structure and Setting of the Institute

The 41st Catalyst Institute was conducted in the summer of 2008 at NMMLP, located at Albuquerque Academy in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Participants included teachers, students, and people from all walks of life.
The Institute was held in a large room within the Albuquerque Academy complex. Tables were arranged in a horseshoe formation to accommodate 30 trainees, 5 trainers, as well as the observer. A name card was placed in each person’s area facing the rest of the audience so it was visible to all. These were rotated each day enabling the participants to get acquainted with each other. The meeting room was well lit and had two glass doors, one in the front and another in the back.

Along one part of the wall were tables of media literacy materials on display. There was a room adjoining the main training area where food and additional activity materials associated with the training were located. These included advertising clips from magazines to be used during the sessions to analyze, critique, or write counter ads.

The Participants

As participants arrived on the first day of class, they were warmly welcomed by the lead trainer, Andrea Quijada. There were a total of 30 participants registered for this Catalyst Institute, which is the maximum NMMLP would allow. Among the people present were 20 representatives from different cities in New Mexico, one from the state of Washington, one from Wisconsin, two from Florida, one from North Carolina, two from Massachusetts, one from California, one from Ohio, and one from London, England.

Although Andrea was the main facilitator, there were four others who helped in the presentation. These were Denis Doyon, video producer; Christie McAuley, curriculum developer; Jessica Lopez, associate program director; and Omar Amed, community outreach director. They took turns presenting information in their areas of expertise. In addition to presenting specific information during the training, they were
all involved each day in facilitating the work of the participants, as they worked in small groups.

Catalyst Institute Protocol

The Institute’s protocol was explained by Andrea, the lead presenter, on the first day of the Institute. One of the key rules during the training was to respect each other’s opinion and interpretation of the media presented. It was noted that, because of varying points of view, different conclusions would be reached by various participants. Not everyone would agree with the opinions of others as they presented their personal interpretations of, for example, an ad they may have seen. Andrea made it clear from the beginning that in the Institute there were no right or wrong media literacy perspectives.

Catalyst Institute Agenda

As noted earlier, the objectives of the Catalyst Institute were to help each participant understand how media messages create meaning, identify who created a particular media message, recognize what the media maker wants its viewers to believe or do, name the “tools of persuasion” used, as well as to recognize bias, spin, misinformation, and lies. Participants were to leave with the ability to create and distribute their own media messages and be advocates for change of the media system. During the Institute and subsequent follow-up with CD-ROMs and DVD-ROMs received upon completion of the training, participants would develop critical thinking skills and become active participants in the media culture. After learning how to access, analyze, and evaluate information found in the media, the long-range goal was for the participants in turn to help train those in their communities, family settings, schools, or work places.
Media literacy was introduced on the first day. There were numerous media literacy activities followed by discussion. On the second day, gender and body image were discussed with additional dialogue on media ownership and independent media. An outside presenter also addressed the group. Discussion on the third day was centered on race and representation, media literacy and health, news and the elections, and other hands-on activities. The presenter spoke about power and privilege. In this presentation, several persuasive techniques were used, including “association,” “beautiful people,” “celebrities,” “experts,” “explicit claims,” “fear,” “charisma,” “rhetorical question,” and “scientific evidence.” On the fourth and final day, there were group activities and discussion on media activism followed by the closing session. Participants were then given four CD-ROMs or DVD-ROMs, depending on the format each participant desired.

The Institute was quite busy, full of activities, fun, and learning. The first day’s activities began at 9:00 a.m. and concluded at 5:10 p.m., with lunch break between 12:00 noon and 1:30 p.m. There were several 10-minute breaks throughout the day. The schedules for the second, third, and fourth days were almost identical to the first, except that each day concluded at 4:00 p.m. Punctuality was emphasized, and participants usually complied with this requirement.

Day One

To begin the session Andrea asked the attendees to describe what they knew about media. The responses gathered helped her assess each attendee’s prior knowledge of the subject. Then each attendee and presenter introduced himself or herself to the group. Information sheets in each attendee’s packet listed each person’s name, mailing address, and e-mail address.
Following introductions, there was a discussion of media as big business and how the main objective of media owners is to make a profit. According to the presenters, media owners seek to please their sponsors, often at the audience’s expense, in the choice of the advertising placed within the typical television program. It was emphasized that the major networks are controlled by a small number of investors, who represent corporate America. Therefore, in essence, corporate America decides what is to be viewed in the family room.

At this time, Andrea explained the Institute’s protocol for respecting the viewpoint of each participant, as noted earlier. She gave a demonstration to illustrate the different perspectives individuals may have on an issue. First she wrote several words on the white board and then asked the participants to define them. Each attendee’s interpretation of the words was unique, illustrating clearly how issues are viewed through the lens of an individual’s experiences and beliefs.

After this session was over, small groups of five or six people were formed to work on group activities. A sheet containing 50 media issues was given to each group. The objective was for each group to choose the issues they thought ranked highest in importance. Three issues in total were to be picked. After the groups completed their assignments, they reconvened to discuss their selections. Each group had to present the reasons for their choices.

Denis, NMMLP’s video producer, then showed a video clip. The purpose of his presentation was to focus on the critical elements at work when viewing a video or any piece of media. He wanted everyone to understand that whenever a video is seen there
are always “texts” and “subtexts.” In the handout for this session, “texts” were defined as:

Any piece of media that you actually see and/or hear. It can include written or spoken words, pictures, graphics, moving images, sounds, and the arrangement or sequence of all these elements. Sometimes the text is called the ‘story’ or ‘manifest text.’ (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2008, p. 5)

“Subtext” was defined as an “interpretation of a piece of media . . . sometimes called the ‘latent text’.” Not actually heard or seen, the subtext is “the meaning we create from the text in our own minds” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2008, p. 5). According to this definition, “media makers (especially advertisers) often create texts that suggest certain subtexts; each person creates his or her own subtexts (interpretation) based on previous experiences, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and values” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2008, p. 5). Denis wanted everyone to understand that all media conveys hidden messages.

He then gave the participants an example to help them understand his point more clearly. He showed a picture of a couple standing by a Land Rover on a beach. Then he asked the attendees to tell him what they saw in the advertisement. The responses reflected each person’s perception of what they viewed. Although the only “text” was “Land Rover,” many of the responses showed that people were interpreting and responding to the meaning they created from the “subtexts.”

This exercise helped me to see how easy it was for the media to send subliminal messages through “subtexts” to viewers, messages that were not being evaluated. This was a key purpose of the Institute—to help individuals decipher these messages, analyze and evaluate them, and then make choices from a more informed stance. I realized that I would not have made these connections without this experience.
There were other key points made during the training. One of these was that media are most influential when they operate on an emotional level, such as when using music during an advertisement. Another key thought was that our media system reflects the values of those individuals who have the power, control, and resources to invest in advertising. And yet another thought was that media-literate young people are active consumers of the media, able to analyze, criticize, and evaluate media messages and make sense out of what is being presented through both “texts” and “subtexts.”

Another key concept discussed during the morning session was “media activism.” The focus of this discussion was how individuals can diffuse and counteract the influence the media has on them. This can happen through “media activism”—the activities of people working together to counteract the power of the media upon the public. These activities have as their goal the improvement of the media environment and include: (a) challenging media messages; (b) supporting independent media; (c) advocating for media reform; (d) working for media justice; and (e) making one’s own media.

By the end of this session it was time for lunch. The participants teamed up, and almost everyone ended up in the same place—the Tomato Café, about 2 miles from our training location. I took advantage of the lunch hour on this first day to interview Christie, NMMLP’s Director of Curriculum.

After lunch we returned and continued with the day’s agenda. The language of persuasion and persuasive techniques were discussed (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2008, p. 5). Many examples were used to help individuals discover the deceptions found in advertising. Camera angles and promises of youthfulness and false success are a few of the tools used in advertising.
Andrea introduced the process of deconstructing advertisements. She pointed out that the objective of most media messages is to persuade the audience to believe or take action. In producing movies, Hollywood employs very expensive special effects to make people believe what they see is real. News stories use direct quotes of identified sources to make individuals believe the stories are accurate; however, some information might be withheld either because of space limitations or to give the stories the particular “spin” of that media source.

Andrea noted several media sources that employ persuasive language, for example, advertisements, public relations departments, and advocacy groups. Advertisements try to persuade us to buy a product or service. The public relations sector seeks to portray a positive image of a corporation, government, or organization. Politicians and advocacy groups (groups that support a particular belief, point of view, policy, or action) support their viewpoints using persuasive language.

Some examples of these persuasive techniques are “association,” “celebrities,” and “humor.” In the technique of “association,” the producer attempts to link a product, service, or idea to something already liked or desired by the target audience. The use of celebrities to advertise a product is effective because of the public’s fascination with famous people. The use of humor grabs attention. When we are laughing, we feel good about an advertisement and are drawn to the product.

Andrea displayed several examples. The most interesting was a huge picture of a hamburger with tomato, meat, lettuce, and the trimmings. She explained how the advertiser’s camera viewpoint is planned so as to arouse a desire to take action and purchase this product. The emphasis in this session was that individuals who desire to
become media literate must learn to use the language of persuasion, one of several media literacy skills.

Jessica, the coordinator for NMMLP, presented next. She focused on questioning techniques used in advertisements. This is a key element in deconstructing media. TV shows, newspapers, movies, advertisements, etc., are constructed by producers with a particular point of view, bias, and set of values. She pointed out that, in order to deconstruct media messages, we need to understand who created the message and who the intended audience was. There is no right or wrong way to deconstruct an advertisement; however, certain questions must be asked in order to reveal how the media producers put the message together. Some of the deconstruction questions are: Whose message is this? Who constructed or paid for it? Why? Who are the target audience? What are the clues (words, images, sounds, etc.)? What tools of persuasion are used? What part of the story is not being told? What is the “text” of the message? (What we actually see and/or hear—written or spoken words, photos, drawings, logos, designs, music, sounds, etc.) What is the “subtext” of the message? (What do you think is the hidden or unstated meaning?)

At the conclusion of the discussion, five or six small groups practiced deconstructing advertisements. Each group chose an advertisement from many made available to the participants of the Catalyst Institute and deconstructed it by applying the techniques previously discussed. Approximately 20 minutes were allocated to complete this assignment, at which time the participants reconvened for presentation or discussion. In the process of completing this assignment, each participant began to understand how media producers create their advertisements and target their audience.
The next step in the training was the application of the deconstruction process to create counter ads. Christie, the Director of Curriculum Development, explained that one must first look at an advertisement and understand its message. A counter ad will include the opposite message. She showed different advertisements and asked how the message of each could be countered.

After this demonstration, the small groups separated to create their own counter ads. Each group chose a clip from a magazine, deconstructed the advertisement, and then created a counter advertisement. Texts, pictures, and drawings were some of the tools used. Each group altered an advertisement by changing the original text and adding graphic elements that reflected their new idea. Some groups pasted pictures or texts over the original ads. Each group presented its counter ad to the entire group. Most of the counter ads were the size of an 8.5-inch x 11-inch sheet of paper. During its presentation each group reported the strategies used in creating its counter advertisement, all of which contained more truthful and constructive messages using the same persuasion techniques employed in the original ad.

**Day Two**

Attendees arrived on time for the second day of the Catalyst Institute. They appeared to be rested and ready for a new day’s work. To begin the day, Andrea asked the group if they had brought advertisements, issues, or other thoughts related to the first day’s discussion to share with the group. In fact, after each day of the Institute, participants were asked to intentionally look for something related to what was discussed the day before. A few people made comments regarding their experiences, describing how they had become more intentional in looking for advertisements and issues
illustrating the topics discussed. This was a good learning strategy that kept the attendees focused on and connected with the topics presented in the class.

After discussion of the previous day’s assignment, Andrea discussed the assignment for Day Four. She gave guidelines to help make the assignment a success. Everyone had to choose a printed media example and decide for what audience the advertisement would be most appropriate. Each participant would give a 5-minute presentation with an opening, middle, and conclusion. The presentation was to employ the basic deconstruction techniques learned on Day One.

Denis then gave the attendees examples of how they could model the deconstruction process to their students or others. At one point he showed a picture of soldiers saluting coffins of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq and asked what emotions the attendees were feeling when they saw the picture. He noted that “a picture is worth a thousand words” and that this one engendered feelings of sympathy toward the war, but that the media continued to show such images so that these feelings gradually began to change from sympathy to opposition.

In the next session Jessica asked the participants to define “stereotype.” They were then asked how “gender” was defined in this country. The phrase “Be a man” was presented, and the group was asked what they thought it meant. Typical responses were “Men don’t cry,” “Men do not show emotions,” etc. When asked to define “Act like a woman,” the attendees responded that the connotation was that women do not chew gum and they must cross their legs when sitting, wear hose, and smile, etc. The participants concluded that our society has certain expectations for each gender.
As Jessica led out in this session, she presented several media clips, some with messages directed to men and others to women. The content of the advertisement, the people featured in it, its tone and mannerisms, and the product being advertised helped the audience discover the target audience. For example, more quiet advertising would likely be targeting women, while the fast-paced, male-dominated ad would target men.

Jessica pointed out that deconstruction techniques may easily be applied in the classroom setting, at home, or at work. Asking the deconstruction questions aids in understanding the context within which the media message is being framed. One of the examples she asked the group to deconstruct was an advertisement for Evian bottled water. It was agreed that the ad was paid for by Evian. And since the ad referred to a return to purity, the participants concluded that it would appeal more to women.

Omar then led out in a discussion on “net neutrality.” He noted the transition from old media forms, for example, newspapers, television, books, films, telephone, and records, to new media. In the 1980s new media using digital technology, such as cell phones, wireless transmitters, CD-ROMs, and computers, began to dominate the media. With the rise of the Internet, new issues have emerged including that of “net neutrality,” which has been defined in this way:

Network neutrality is the principle that Internet users should be in control of what content they view and what applications they use on the Internet. The Internet has operated according to this neutrality principle since its earliest days. Indeed, it is this neutrality that has allowed many companies, including Google, to launch, grow, and innovate. Fundamentally, net neutrality is about equal access to the Internet. (Google, 2008, ¶ 2)

Proponents of net neutrality want to preserve the free and open Internet with equal access for all. They believe the Internet should continue to provide an outlet for opposing
views, and consumers should have the right to use the Internet without restrictions by the provider.

Product placement was another issue discussed on the second day of the Catalyst Institute. It was noted that media producers frequently include advertisements in the actual program itself. For example, a bottle of Coca Cola might be placed somewhere in the television scene, or the name of a product might be included in a character’s script.

**Day Three**

Another day of high expectations had dawned. On the third day attendees seemed to be a little tired. Andrea showed a video clip featuring an individual who appeared to be overwhelmed and totally worn out. She told the group she understood how they were feeling, but that the seminar would be over soon and they should persevere. As an observer, teacher, and human being, I appreciated the empathy shown to the trainees.

The attendees were then given the opportunity to share any observations they had made of advertisements, movies, or news clips seen the previous day. Once again this assignment had been given the day before as a means of applying the skills presented during the previous session.

After the attendees had shared their experiences, Eric Chrisps, an anthropologist, was invited to make a guest presentation on “Power and Privilege.” This was a very motivating and powerful presentation. Chrisps spoke passionately about the inequality present in our world today and the various institutions subscribing to it. To begin the dialogue, he wrote two words, “power” and “non-power,” on a whiteboard. Attendees were asked what they thought should be written under each category. Under “power”
were written “whites,” “men,” “citizens,” “Christians,” “heterosexuals,” “rich,” “English speakers.” Under “non-power” were listed the opposites of these words.

Chrisps pointed out that non-powerful people can become powerful. An advertising clip for Tide laundry detergent was shown. One of the texts on the advertisement read, “Your true color stays true.” Although he noted that the statement did not refer to the concept of race, some attendees insisted that it did intimate that the status of non-Whites would never change. Another attendee commented that it was not fair to look at all ads through a negative lens.

Another clip was presented showing Blacks in a Wal-Mart advertisement. One participant thought it conveyed the idea that Blacks were only good enough to work at Wal-Mart. I suggested that perhaps Wal-Mart was using Black actors to show its equal opportunity employment practices and that the advertisement was a positive gesture to the Black community showing they were welcome in the Wal-Mart family. I also conjectured that this advertisement may have run in predominantly Black areas. Again, it was obvious that we all had different perspectives with which we viewed the media.

Following small-group discussion of the Tide and Wal-Mart commercials, the attendees returned to the conference room to listen to Chrisps. He noted that Caucasians have more privilege than they themselves realize. He pointed out that being Caucasian is almost a guarantee that an individual would move upward on the socioeconomic scale. The analogy used in his illustration was the moving walkway we often find at an airport. When a traveler steps on the walkway, little or no effort is required to get to the set destination. The walkway does the work. According to Chrisps, being Caucasian is like
the traveler on the walkway in that little effort is required to move upwards in society, whereas being non-White would require more work to change one’s present status.

After lunch break, attendees returned to the conference room where movie clips were shown of advertisements containing skits using persuasive techniques previously discussed. This session was intended to prepare the attendees to use skits to create their own advertisements.

During the next session, several movie clips were shown of celebrities smoking. Denis presented data indicating that young people who saw their favorite movie stars smoke were more likely to start smoking themselves. Celebrity role models were more influential than peer pressure. Denis noted that there is a strong demand to keep smoking out of motion pictures because of these statistics.

**Day Four**

By the fourth day attendees were drained, and some were missing. More video clips were shown of celebrities smoking in the media. Additional research was shared indicating that adolescents who watched these movies were more likely to develop a tobacco habit themselves. This presentation definitely pointed out the need to educate our youth to become media literate.

The next session was a small-group activity assigned on Day Two. Each attendee had been asked to choose an advertisement to present in his or her small group using the basic deconstruction techniques found in the Catalyst Institute handout. The target audience of the advertisement had to be identified as well. The presentation itself was not to exceed 5 minutes in length. Feedback was provided by the other members of the group on whether or not all the basic deconstruction techniques were used.
After lunch break, the group gathered for the final session. During this session, media ownership was discussed once again. It was noted that, since the media is owned by a very small group of individuals with their own values, biases, and points of view, often individuals feel the information conveyed in the media should be counteracted. One means of counteracting the messages of mainstream media is the use of low power FM transmitters by which communities can create their own radio stations to offer differing points of view.

Early on in the Institute, I observed that the teaching methods employed by the presenters during the Catalyst Institute resembled those described by Wiggins and McTighe in their book *Understanding by Design* (2005). According to this educational framework, teachers should apply the “backward design” process to guide their teaching. This process is comprised of three stages.

The first stage in “backward design” is to identify the desired goals before the teaching process begins. The questions posed at the onset are: “What should students know, understand, and be able to do? What content is worthy of understanding? What enduring understandings are desired?” (p. 17).

In the second stage Wiggins and McTighe (2005) look for acceptable evidence to show that students have actually acquired proficiency and understanding of the subject matter. At the Catalyst Institute, attendees were asked to demonstrate understanding of counter advertising by including a persuasion technique used by the media, such as humor, fear, or extrapolation, in a counter advertisement they designed. As each member of a small group took turns presenting, rubrics were used to evaluate the presenter’s understanding of the concept.
In the third stage Wiggins and McTighe (2005) plan learning experiences and instruction designed to produce the expected results. They ask, “What enabling knowledge (facts, concepts, principles) and skills (processes, procedures, strategies) will students need in order to perform effectively and achieve the desired results? What activities will equip students with the needed knowledge and skills?” (pp. 18-19). In this stage the authors also ask questions about what would need to be presented and how it should be best taught to obtain the optimum results. The materials and resources needed to foster the desired goals are also considered. The learning experiences and instruction of NMMLP’s Summer 2008 Catalyst Institute were designed to create critical thinking in the area of media literacy. The presenters selected resources, materials, and methods to engage as well as involve every participant in such a way that these expected results were attained.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) emphasize that the backward design process “may be thought of as purposeful task analysis: Given a worthy task to be accomplished, how do we best get everyone equipped?” (p. 19). The Summer 2008 Catalyst Institute allowed every participant an opportunity to have hands-on experience during the many planned activities.

**Summary**

The 4-day Summer Catalyst Institute presented by the staff of NMMLP illustrates the training process this organization employs to teach attendees media literacy skills and how they can, in turn, teach these skills to others. The carefully crafted strategies used throughout the 4-day Institute enabled the participants to become well-versed in the techniques of media literacy education.
This chapter illustrates how the practical application of a theoretical offering, as illustrated in NMMLP’s Catalyst Institute, will show how the educational process brings results. In addition to a discussion of the educational theory behind media literacy education, this chapter described in detail the actual activities that take place in a typical media literacy education program.
CHAPTER 7

THEMES

This chapter describes specific and overarching themes derived from the analysis of data acquired through interviews, observation, and examination of documents. Merriam (1998) calls this methodology “the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 178), which she says involves “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (p. 178). These three sources were employed because, according to Patton (2001), “using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings” (p. 306). According to Eisner (1998), “the use of multiple data sources is one of the ways conclusions can be structurally corroborated” (p. 56).

The staff of NMMLP were interviewed personally and observed during the 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute. Documents from the organization were also analyzed to compare with the responses given by the interviewees.

Six key themes connected to the research questions were derived from the data. These were: (a) change, (b) critical thinking, (c) role play, (d) training model, (e) relevance, and (f) networking.
NMMLP was conceived as a result of one person’s dream to fight the control of the media over individuals’ lives and bring about a media-literate society. Dee Dee Downs, a television producer for 18 years, became frustrated with the direction the media were heading. During our interview she shared, “I thought that it had lost a lot of integrity, and I just didn’t want to work there anymore” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 2). Dee Dee’s dream took her to New Mexico where her objective was to start a media literacy organization and expand it to every state in the country. Though the project did not go nationwide as she had intended, it did become established in New Mexico and is currently located at Albuquerque Academy in Albuquerque, New Mexico. According to Dee Dee,

It was supposed to be national but New Mexico was the only place where it really took hold. So I mean we were really hoping to make New Mexico an example for the rest of the country and spread it, and I think that they have succeeded in doing that to a certain extent, but they are the only ones that have a formal training program. But the way they’re handling it is just miraculous, and I’m kind of amazed that it’s still in operation. (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 1)

Another objective Dee Dee wished to accomplish was to create training programs where teachers trained other teachers, who would in turn train others. She explained:

But unfortunately there were just a few teachers who then really became the trainers, and the original vision never really happened, which was the teachers training the teachers training the teachers. That didn’t happen. Instead it became a single entity that would train teachers. So a lot of . . . teachers came through the program and were trained and then went back to their schools and presumably implemented [what they had learned]. (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 5)

Although NMMLP may not have accomplished these objectives exactly as Dee Dee had envisioned, under her direction, this grassroots media literacy movement began to gain a foothold in American education.
Because of personal concerns, Dee Dee was compelled to turn the organization over to someone who would keep her dream alive. Bob McCannon, a media education teacher at Albuquerque Academy, accepted the directorship of the organization in 1993 and remained the director for over a decade. The organization has been in existence now for 17 years and has experienced growth as well as change.

The organization’s mission statement describes its desire to be a catalyst for change. It reads, “Our mission is to cultivate critical thinking and activism in our media culture to build healthy and just communities (Vol. 3, Section 1, p. 1). Several strategies for change can be seen in their training programs. One is the “deconstruction” of media messages. Participants are told that “All media messages—TV shows, newspapers, movies, advertisements, etc.—are made or constructed by people” (Vol. 4, Section 5, p. 1). NMMLP teaches people how to deconstruct (take apart) media messages in order to understand how they are constructed.

Deconstructing a media message can help us understand who created the message, and who is intended to receive it. It can reveal how the media maker put together the message using words, images, sounds, design, and other elements. It can expose the point of view of media makers, their values, and their biases. It can also uncover hidden meaning—intended or unintended. (Vol. 4, Section 5, p. 1)

As individuals learn the language of persuasion techniques employed by the media to convince people to take action, they begin to change the way they view the media-saturated world in which they live. Denis explained,

And using those deconstruction questions, we can start to learn something about the media messages. We can learn something about our society and how media plays a role in maintaining certain structures in our society or changing them. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 5)
NMMLP constantly seeks new direction to help fulfill its mission. For example, recently this organization has begun work in the area of media justice. This area, they believe, is a very important segment of media literacy. According to Christie,

Yes, I think one of the areas that we’re moving into, and this is kind of new ground for us, but we’ve recently received a grant from . . . an organization called MAG-Net . . . Media Action Grassroots Network. This is an area that we’re branching out in. . . . So we feel it’s important to educate communities who may be underrepresented with regards to getting that information about the digital transition out. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 7)

Denis, summarizing this change in direction, said,

So we are basically in the MAG-Net network the lead organizer in New Mexico for a media justice movement. So that work is just beginning, but it will involve some changes in what we do and how we do it. That I think is a good positive change and is a sign of growth of the field. It’s a new effort, and I think it’s something that we will be devoting more resources to. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 4)

NMMLP trains individuals to become media activists. Its Catalyst Institute and other training programs have empowered thousands of people to be advocates and activists for a media-literate society (Vol. 3, Section 1, p. 1).

**Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking is one of the NMMLP’s core principles. It is embedded in their mission statement, “. . . to cultivate critical thinking . . .” (Vol. 3, Section 1, p. 1). According to Steven Schafersman (1991), “Critical thinking means correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world. . . . It is reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (¶ 1).

He continues:

A person who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, gather relevant information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically
from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the
world that enable one to live and act successfully in it. Critical thinking is not being
able to process information well enough to know to stop for red lights or whether you
received the correct change at the supermarket. Such low-order thinking, critical and
useful though it may be, is sufficient only for personal survival; most individuals
master this. True critical thinking is higher-order thinking, enabling a person to, for
example, responsibly judge between political candidates, serve on a murder trial jury,
evaluate society's need for nuclear power plants, and assess the consequences of
global warming. Critical thinking enables an individual to be a responsible citizen
who contributes to society, and not be merely a consumer of society's distractions.
(Schafersman, 1991, Definition of Critical Thinking, ¶ 1)

In conclusion, critical thinking, according to Fisher and Scriven (1997), is “skilled, active
interpretation and evaluation of observations, communications, information, and
argumentation” (p. 21).

When asked about the educational theory used to select their strategies for
teaching critical thinking, most of the staff responded in a manner indicating they had
given little thought to the theory behind their work. Andrea commented, “I would say I
don’t think I personally, as a trainer, rely on a particular theory” (Vol. 1, Section 6, p. 4).
However, although no one could identify one, the data I collected indicated that the
strategies used in NMMLP’s training programs to develop critical thinking did, in fact,
employ principles and components of several educational theories.

For example, the strategy of questioning as delineated in the book Classroom
Instruction That Works: Research-based Strategies for Improving Student Achievement
(Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001) is used extensively in teaching the media literacy
skill of deconstruction of advertisements. Marzano et al. state that “questions designed to
help students obtain a deeper understanding of content will eventually increase their
interest in the topic.” “Higher level” questions produce deeper meaning than “lower
level” questions. They explained that research findings have shown that “questions that
simply require students to analyze information—frequently called higher level questions—produce more learning than questions that simply require students to recall or recognize information—frequently referred to as lower-order questions (p. 113).

To develop the critical thinking skills needed to be media literate, one must learn to question the sources of information to which he or she is exposed, including advertising. NMMLP teaches the use of questions to unveil hidden messages that may be contained in advertisements in a process called “deconstruction.” Deconstruction involves “closely examining and taking apart media messages to understand how they work” (Vol. 4, Section 5, p. 1). According to the Catalyst Institute syllabus, “Deconstructing a media message can help us understand who created the message, and who is intended to receive it. It can reveal how media makers put together the message using words, images, sound, design, and other elements” (Vol. 4, Section 5, p. 1).

There are several key concepts to help individuals understand how the media operate. The concepts are as follows: All media messages are created; and the creator could be an individual writer, photographer, or blogger. Media messages are intended to reach a target audience—specific groups of people who may be classified by age, gender, class, or interests. The text is composed of written words, while the subtext is an individual’s interpretation of the media message. Persuasion techniques are the various techniques used to persuade people to believe or do something. If one can spot the techniques used, he or she is less likely to be persuaded and more likely to think critically. Point of view is the angle from which the story teller chooses to tell the story. The story may not be told in its entirety, thereby skewing the message sent.
Deconstruction questions help identify the persuasion techniques employed by media makers. During the 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute, the presenters showed various clips from television commercials and magazines. The attendees were instructed to use the deconstruction questions found in the syllabus as a guide to deconstruct the advertisement in order to better understand its meaning. According to the presenters, there are basic, intermediate, and advanced deconstruction questions. These include: Whose message is this? Who created it? Who is the target audience? What are the “text” and “subtext” of the message? What part of the story is not being told? What values are expressed? What “tools of persuasion” are used?

The deconstruction questions noted above serve to create a “mental set” as described by Marzano et al. (2001):

We generally think of questioning as something teachers do after students have been engaged in a learning experience—watching a demonstration, reading, listening to a lecture. Teachers, however, can use questions before a learning experience to establish a ‘mental set’ with which students process the learning experience. (p. 114)

During the session on deconstruction of advertisements, Catalyst Institute attendees were asked to form small groups of five or six people and choose an advertisement from magazines provided. They were instructed to use the deconstruction questions to “dissect” the advertisement. It was during this session that individuals learned how media messages were constructed and how they are designed to influence their target audience.

Later, in another small-group session, each person was asked to use the deconstruction questions to explain to the group his or her own deconstruction of an advertisement. This was very important in the learning process because each person had
an opportunity to receive feedback from the other members of the group. Through this process, individuals were able to apply their newly learned critical thinking skills.

During her interview Christie stated, “One thing that makes it unique is that it’s typically hands-on, and we try to model what we hope people can do” (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 3). Christie believed that when individuals participate in the learning process by practicing what they are to use in the future, it becomes part of them. She added,

I think part of that is giving information by trying to do it in a way that’s interactive so we’re not lecturing or we’re not telling people how to think a certain way, but giving them information . . . in a way that’s palatable for them. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 3)

**Role Play**

Another teaching method NMMLP practices is “role play.” Role play, according to Joyce, Weil, and Showers (1992), is a teaching model that has its roots in both the personal and social dimensions of education. It attempts to help individuals find personal meaning within their social worlds and to resolve personal dilemmas with the assistance of the social group. Individuals work together in analyzing social situations, especially interpersonal problems, and in developing decent and democratic ways of coping with these situations (p. 55).

Role play deals with problems through action. A problem is presented and acted out, and discussion ensues. At the 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute, one of the many small-group activities involved role playing. In this activity participants were presented a simulated problem for which they were to seek a solution—to create an advertisement using the persuasion techniques outlined in a handout given to each attendee. According to the handout,
The goal of most media messages is to persuade the audience to believe or do something. Hollywood movies use expensive special effects to make us believe that what we’re seeing is real. News stories use several techniques—such as direct quotation of identified sources—to make us believe that the story is accurate. (Vol. 4, Section 4, p. 4)

In media these persuasion techniques are used to convince people to take action. One of NMMLP’s objectives is to help people learn the language of persuasion. During the role play, participants employed many of the persuasion techniques outlined in the handout to show their understanding of how media producers attempt to influence their target audience. A few of these techniques are described here:

**Association**

This technique links a product, service, or idea to something liked or desired by the target audience, such as fun, pleasure, beauty, intimacy, etc. The media text does not explicitly say that one will acquire these things, but the message is implied.

**Bandwagon**

No one wants to be left behind. These advertisements urge us to “jump on the bandwagon” and do what everyone else is doing.

**Beautiful People**

In many advertisements beautiful people are used to get our attention. The creators of these messages take advantage of society’s obsession with body image (for which they are largely responsible) and play on the desire of viewers to have the “ideal” body image as portrayed in the media.
Fear

Many advertisements focus on objects that are feared or disliked in an effort to sell products they claim will prevent or fix them. Some examples of these are bad breath, an imperfect body, or high taxes.

Role playing often revealed the negative effects of advertised products. For example, an advertisement would never present the truth about the harmful effects of cigarette smoking or alcohol consumption, but in role play an individual can show the negative side of smoking or drinking. Through such role play facts can be presented as participants experience the process of constructing their own advertisements. The authors of *Models of Teaching* (Joyce et al., 1992) support the use of role playing as a strategy for presenting such real life situations. They state:

First, role playing implicitly advocates an experience-based learning situation in which the ‘here and now’ becomes the content of instruction. The model assumes that it is possible to create authentic analogies to real life problem situations and that through these recreations students can ‘simplify’ life. Thus, the enactment elicits genuine, typical emotional responses and behaviors from the students. (p. 56)

Role playing enabled the participants to practice the media concepts they had learned. Denis reflected on the impact of individuals creating counter messages to nullify negative ones.

And we also see media literacy as not just having the skills to be able to understand media messages, which is like the reading part of literacy, but also to be able to create your own messages and to be active in the media culture, whether it’s changing, working for changes in the media culture, challenging media messages that you find objectionable, working to reform or change the media system, supporting independent media. (Vol. 1, Section 3, pp. 2-3)
Training Model

Although the staff were unconscious of the fact, the four components of effective teaching described by Joyce et al. (1992) were incorporated in the teaching strategies employed in the Catalyst Institute. The first component of successful teaching focuses on knowledge and consists of exploration of theory or rationale through discussions, readings, and lectures. This is necessary for an understanding of the concepts behind a skill or strategy and the principles that govern its use (p. 73).

Joyce et al. (1992) explain that the “study of theory facilitates skill acquisition by increasing one’s understanding of demonstrations, by providing a mental image to guide practice and clarify feedback, and by promoting the attainment of executive control” (p. 73). NMMLP believes media literacy education gives individuals a rationale for developing skills, enabling them to better understand media messages. According to their handout,

Media literacy is a set of skills that anyone can learn. Just as literacy is the ability to read and write, media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media messages of all kinds.

Media literate youth and adults are better able to decipher the complex messages we receive from television, radio, newspapers, magazine books. . . . They can understand how these media messages are constructed, and discover how they create meaning—usually in ways hidden beneath the surface. (Vol. 4, Section 2, p. 1)

The second training component employed by Joyce et al. (1992) is the demonstration, or modeling, of the skills that are taught. Skills need to be demonstrated in different settings, for example, through film or videotape, or conducted live in the training setting. They add, “Mastery of the rationale of the skill facilitates discrimination, and modeling facilitates the understanding of underlying theories by illustrating them in
action” (p. 74). As noted above, NMMLP uses films, DVD-ROMs, and modeling to illustrate the concepts presented.

The third component is practice under simulated conditions. According to Joyce et al. (1992), the conditions under which practice is simulated should be closely reflective of the actual setting. They believe “peer teaching,” practice with other teachers, brings mistakes to the surface and provides experience as “students” and trainers profit from one another’s ideas and skills.

NMMLP follows a strategy similar to this as described by Christie,

One thing that makes it unique is that it’s typically hands-on, and we try to model what we hope people can actually do. So when we’re doing a “train the trainers” we try to model the information we give through presentations, and we structure our training so people can have a hands-on experience, whether it’s in a small group or as a participant in a large group. And I think that’s what helps make it effective and also makes it really tangible. (Vol. 1, Section 5, p. 3)

Participants at the Catalyst Institute participated in role play, which allowed each to practice what they learned and correct mistakes through the feedback received from the group.

The fourth and final component of effective teaching, according to Joyce et al. (1992), is peer coaching. This strategy gives validity to the teaching process. According to Joyce et al., “It begins during training and continues in the workplace. Peer coaching provides support for the community of teachers attempting to master new skills and to plan and develop lessons” (p. 74). NMMLP used peer coaching frequently in their training sessions. In the deconstruction of advertisements, the participants had to employ deconstruction questions to contradict the advertising clips they chose. This was accomplished with the support of their peers in the small groups created during the Catalyst Institute.
Relevance

Relevance is a term used to describe “how pertinent, connected, or applicable something is to a given matter. A thing is relevant if it serves as a means to a given purpose” (“Relevance,” 2009). NMMLP continually modifies its training to meet the needs of its clients and to stay abreast of changes in the media. Observations during my visit to this organization and the interviews I had with the staff support this assertion.

During the 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute many current issues were discussed, such as the digital television transition and the media’s influence on society’s preoccupation with body image. The staff of NMMLP state, “We offer dynamic multimedia presentations using lots of media examples so that everyone in the audience—from the smallest preschooler to the seasoned media activist—can improve their media literacy skills” (Vol. 3, Section 3, p. 1).

A recently adopted goal of their training programs is to introduce people to the media justice movement. When I spoke with Denis during an interview regarding NMMLP’s goals for the future, one of the things he articulated was the need to address media justice issues:

And something that’s growing right now, just in the past few years, is the emergence of a media justice framework, a media justice movement, which is doing a lot of the same things that we’ve been talking about, but looking at it through a different lens, looking at it through a social justice lens, looking at it through an organizing lens. So we are moving in that direction of putting more emphasis on media justice, analysis of our media system, our media environment, and media justice. . . . We recently joined MAG-Net, Media Action Grassroots Network, an emerging national network of local and regional groups. So we are basically in the MAG-Net network the lead organizer in New Mexico for a media justice movement. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 17)
Paula also noted the new emphasis on media justice:

But we are also starting to do media justice work. And it’s important to look at justice issues, about how people are represented in media, what messages, subliminal and intentional, are sent out. For instance, looking at news programs, how is [the news] reported, what information is provided, [through] what frame or lens are the producers looking? (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 1)

Omar stated that one of the organization’s goals is to expand its understanding of and responsiveness to the needs of the general public. He continued, “We have to alter the way that we provide information so that it doesn’t become stagnant, that it’s always fresh, that it’s always new, that it’s always relevant so that people continue to take an interest in it” (Vol. 1, Section 8, p. 1). Denis pointed out that when the staff are apprised of unaddressed issues, they take it upon themselves to address them:

And sometimes it’s just issues that we think from our interaction with people—it’s some issues that we think, ‘This issue isn’t being addressed. There’s no other resource out there for people on this issue. So let’s do something.’ So [we produced] the Media and Body Image DVD . . . and the one coming out this fall, Media and Bullying. (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 5)

He continued, “We saw a need in schools. There are a lot of teachers who are addressing these issues, wanting to address these issues. They didn’t really have a resource that addressed the media’s role in [creating these problems]” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 6).

Paula also addressed the theme of relevancy, saying, “I really think that we adjust what we’re doing based on responses of the participants” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 3). She described the way Andrea, then the Director of Education, modified her presentations to reflect the needs of her audience.

Honestly that’s one of the gifts that Andrea truly has. She can on the fly, adjust a program and adjust a presentation based on the group that she’s working with. And that’s a skill we’re very, very fortunate to have. (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 3)
She continued, “We try to be timely. But we also try to provide information that’s fairly current for a lot of different reasons. . . . The media landscape is changing so quickly that it’s important to be responsive” (Vol. 1, Section 4, p. 6).

**Networking**

As I reviewed the history and daily operation of NMMLP, it seemed to me it came into existence and continues to thrive through the process of networking. According to Dee Dee’s account, sometime after moving to the western mountains of Massachusetts, she decided to teach video production. Four schools accepted her proposal and agreed to offer credit to the students taking this course. At this point, Dee Dee began to network with the leaders of the media literacy movement of that time.

Following a newspaper account of her work with high-school students, she got a call from a media literacy expert at Harvard, Renee Hobbs. Dee Dee recollected, “So I don’t know how Renee Hobbs found out. . . . Oh, I know. There was an article in the paper in the Berkshires, where I was teaching, about what I was doing and why I was doing it” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 2).

This one phone call introduced Dee Dee to the media literacy network, resulting in the birth of NMMLP. Dee Dee was invited by Hobbs to speak to her Ph.D. candidates about the work she was doing. After some deliberation, she accepted the invitation. “Anyway, I got there, and it went very well. And everyone [was] really interested, and so that’s how I hooked up with the community, the media literacy community” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 3).

When Dee Dee learned the United States lagged behind other countries in media literacy education, she decided to take action. She decided to launch her own media
literacy education program. She contacted her dad, broadcast newscaster Hugh Downs, asking to use his name to give credibility to this venture. He accepted the invitation to be the chairman of its board. With the aid of her father’s name, she was able to reach leaders in the media literacy movement such as Noam Chomsky and Neil Postman. Neil Postman accepted the position of president of the new organization. Dee Dee continued,

So then the first thing that happened with Neil [was] he said, “Listen, I’m supposed to go to a media literacy conference at the Aspen Institute. . . . But I want to send you instead as my colleague.” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 4)

It was at this meeting that Dee Dee made her initial media literacy presentation.

Soon after this meeting Dee Dee began to organize a media literacy conference to take place at the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque. Influential people attended this conference, and a good number of teachers were present, too. “We had teachers from all over the state that we were able to bring in. . . . It felt like it was close to somewhere between fifty and a hundred teachers” (Vol. 1, Section, p.5). The stage was set for her work to begin. The objective of the 4-day conference was to have media experts train the teachers, and the teachers would, in turn, become trainers. However, this did not happen. She reminisced, “But unfortunately there were just a few teachers who then really became the trainers, and the original vision never really happened, which was the teachers training the teachers” (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 5).

Although Dee Dee’s plan did not materialize as she envisioned, networking among the teachers began to occur. “A lot of New Mexico teachers came through the program and were trained and then went back to their schools and presumably implemented [their media literacy skills] (Vol. 1, Section 1, p. 5). Denis noted that Dee Dee dreamed of establishing a media literacy organization in New Mexico and then
continuing until there were similar organizations in all 50 states. She made numerous contacts. According to Denis, “After they organized a conference here at the Academy called ‘Teaching around Television,’ it [attracted the attention of] a lot of national experts on television and the effect of TV on children” (Vol. 1, Section 3, p. 1).

Because of her work in media production, she had many connections that eventually led to the establishment of NMMLP. However, when she realized that her expertise was not in the area of non-profit fundraising, she decided to look for someone to take over the organization. Because of her prior connection to Albuquerque Academy, she contacted Bob McCannon, a teacher at the Academy, with the proposal to turn the organization over to him. He accepted the offer. When I spoke with Bob, he said,

She came to a point where she decided that running a media education project really wasn’t her cup of tea within six or eight months of starting the project. So she came to me with a proposal that maybe Albuquerque Academy could subsidize the Project under my leadership. (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 1)

Eventually an agreement was reached, and Albuquerque Academy took over the project under the leadership of Bob McCannon. Bob said, “The project started, and I ran it part time for a couple of years. We began selling [educational resources], and one thing led to another, and I became employed full time” (Vol. 1, Section 2, p. 2).

After Bob’s retirement, NMMLP has continued to lead in the media literacy movement.

NMMLP has continued Dee Dee’s legacy of networking. Networking has helped sustain them and kept their mission alive. As Paula noted, “The school [Albuquerque Academy] houses the project. It also provides technical support, personnel support, and . . . benefits for all of the staff members, which, as for any non-profit, having security and benefits is an incredible gift” (Vol. 1., Section 4, p. 2).
NMMLP also continues its relationship with the New Mexico Department of Health, Tobacco Use Prevention and Control (TUPAC), from which it receives major financial support through grants. Through these grants NMMLP is able to continue providing educational programs to many institutions and organizations. At this time, NMMLP is nationally recognized as a leader in media literacy education. We have worked with schools, nonprofit organizations and government agencies across the nation, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, National Center for Substance Abuse Preventions, Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, National Latino Council on Alcohol and Tobacco Prevention, American Indian Tobacco Education Network, and Community Technology Centers Network (CTX Net). (Vol. 3, Section 1, p. 1)

As noted earlier, recently the organization has joined the Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net) in its work in the media justice movement. Through these organizations, NMMLP has been able to create a vast networking system that continues to garner it name recognition in the field of media literacy. Networking helped launch NMMLP and continues to propel this organization to the forefront of media literacy education.
CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY OF STUDY

The Problem

Media inundate our culture and daily bombard individuals with massive amounts of information. According to a survey conducted by Common Sense Media in 2003, 9 out of 10 American parents blame the media for the fact their children are becoming too materialistic (90%) and using more vulgar language (90%), while 89% said the media were responsible for their children’s engaging in sexual activity at younger ages. The report indicated the vast majority of parents believe the media are responsible for their children’s loss of innocence (88%) and violent or anti-social behavior (85%) (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999). This report revealed 37% of parents blame television as “having the most negative impact” of all forms of media, with video games coming in second (19%) and music third (17%).

The National Television Violence Study analyzed programming over three consecutive TV seasons from 1994 to 1997 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003c). The results clearly connect the rising tide of violence in children to the media. Two out of three television programs contained violence, averaging about six violent acts per hour. In fact, violence was found in more children’s programming (69%) than in programs for adult audiences (57%). The study found that in a typical hour, children’s programs
featured more than twice as many violent incidents (14) than other types of programming (6).

Despite their concerns over violence in the media, “most parents provided a media-rich environment for their children, often with little supervision” (Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, as cited in Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003b). Furthermore, 4 in 10 children (42%) live in a home where the TV set is on in the background most of the time even when no one is watching. Fifty-eight percent of children live in homes where the TV is on during mealtimes (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). Among children ages 8 and over, 65% have a TV in their bedrooms, 45% have a video game player, and 36% have a VCR.

Television is only partially responsible for the negative influence media has had on our society. Individuals are exposed daily to radio, newspapers, video games, cell phones, movies, the Internet, as well as billboards. With the rise of popular media and its availability to everyone in our society, scholars are demanding that media consumers be educated to make more meaningful interaction with them (Brunner & Tally, 1999; Massey, 2001; McLaren et al., 1995; Semali & Pailliotet, 1999). Massey (2001) urges viewers to “make the commitment not merely to consume but to study media by gathering information for . . . review and analysis” (p. xix). McLaren et al. (1995) urge the development of critical media literacy, in addition to functional literacy, the acquisition of the rudimentary skills of reading and writing, and cultural literacy, the acquisition of basic knowledge concerning one’s culture (p. xiv). According to McLaren et al., critical media literacy refers to the acquiring of skills necessary to analyze and critically dissect all the forms of culture with which individuals interact” (p. xv).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the history and background of NMMLP and explore how this organization trains individuals to implement principles of media literacy in various settings.

Related Literature

As American culture becomes increasingly inundated with media messages and images, various advocates and educators are promoting media literacy education as a means of mitigating their effects on society (Brunner & Tally, 1999; Christ & Potter, 1998; Massey, 2001; McLaren et al., 1995; Semali & Pailliotet, 1999). Christ and Potter (1998) observe, “There is a sharply growing realization among educators that it is essential to teach people to understand the media and their messages” (p. 6). Despite the fact that scholars agree there is a need to teach media literacy, there has been much debate on the manner of its implementation.

In her article “The Seven Great Debates in the Literacy Movement,” Renee Hobbs (1998) states, “Media literacy . . . is a concept whose broad definition and range of applications lead to diverse approaches, creating some intriguing conflicts and tensions” (p. 16). Tyner (1992, as cited in Hobbs, 1998) draws parallels between the emerging media literacy movement in the United States and the “parable of the blind men and the elephant, each of whom senses a tiny part of the whole” (p. 16). Hobbs notes that media educators who come from different disciplinary backgrounds in media studies, the fine and performing arts, history, education, and literary analysis, tend to defend their own understanding of what it means to access, analyze, evaluate, or create media texts without trying to understand other approaches (p. 16).
At the founding convention of the Cultural Environment Movement in St. Louis in April 1996, Bob McCannon, director of NMMLP, declared, “Whenever media literacy educators get together, they always circle the wagon, and shoot it!” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 25). However, the National Media Literacy Conference held in Los Angeles in 1996 drew high-school English teachers, college professors, screenwriters, advocates for television, public health experts, etc., for a 3-day conference where “a wide range of voices and points of view were heard” (p. 25). According to Hobbs, the diversity of perspectives may have helped bring these individuals together for the common objective of studying media literacy. During this conference, it was agreed that “media literacy education must be the pedagogy of inquiry, which is the act of asking questions about media texts. The cultivation of an open, questioning, reflective, and critical stance towards symbolic texts should be the center pole” (p. 27).

Lewis and Jhally (1998) maintain that mass media should be understood as more than a collection of texts to be deconstructed and analyzed so one can distinguish or choose among them. Rather, “they should be analyzed as sets of institutions with particular social and economic structures that are neither inevitable nor irreversible” (p. 109). Media education should teach students to engage media texts but must also teach them to engage and challenge media institutions. Additionally, media literacy “is about awareness of why those messages are there” (p. 110). They explain that it is not enough to know that these messages are produced, or even how they are produced. The objective is to know why they are produced, under what constraints and conditions, and by whom.

Since Zettl’s assertion (1998) that guidelines were needed to help translate these goals into a workable curriculum, the National Association for Media Literacy Education
(NAMLE) formulated a core set of principles for media literacy education in the United States. These principles define media literacy and the strategies employed in evaluating, analyzing, and criticizing media messages. Those principles are:

1. Media literacy education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.

2. Media literacy education expands the concept of literacy (that is, reading and writing) to include all forms of media.

3. Media literacy education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.

4. Media literacy education develops informed, reflective, and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.

5. Media literacy education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.

6. Media literacy education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs, and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages (NAMLE, 2009).

NAMLE has also formulated key questions that can be used to analyze media messages. Some of them are as follows:

1. Who made this message?

2. Why was this made?

3. Who is the target audience (and how do you know)?

4. Who paid for this?

5. Who might benefit from this message?

6. Why might this message matter to me?
7. What ideas, values, information, and/or points of view are overt? Implied?
8. What techniques are used? How do they communicate the message?
9. How might different people understand this message differently?
10. When was this made?
11. Is this fact, opinion, or something else?
12. How credible is this (and what makes you think that)?

NAMLE (2007) states:

We believe that these Core Principles articulate a common ground around which media literacy educators and advocates can coalesce. NAMLE is committed to using the Core Principles as a springboard for vibrant and ongoing dialogue, and as a first step in the development of clear, measurable outcomes and benchmarks for U.S. schools. We invite you to actively join in that conversation at events like the National Media Education Conference and online at www.NAMLE.net. (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2007, p. 3, ¶ 3)

The media literacy movement has gone through many theoretical and pedagogical phases. In the early years media education was dominated by the “Leavisite” philosophy of the 1930s, which attempted, according to Buckingham (1998), to protect students and society from the presumed negative influence of mass media. This protectionist stance, championed by F. R. Leavis and his student Denys Thompson, aimed to protect individuals from the “agents of cultural decline” (Buckingham, 1998, p. 21).

Buckingham’s work, *Media Education in the UK: Moving Beyond Protectionism* (1998), describes how the goals of media literacy education have since changed. Hobbs (1998) notes that this rationale was ultimately ineffective because “many teachers at both the K-12 and university levels . . . found that students are unresponsive to the idea that they are helpless victims of media influence who need to be rescued” (p. 19). Hobbs points out that, under this philosophy, media education is taught in an “instructor-focused
classroom, where the teacher tells the student the ‘facts’ . . . and the student listens quietly and takes notes‖ (p. 19). She emphasizes that this type of teaching and learning may result only in causing “students to parrot the correct interpretations—the ones the teacher has sanctioned” (p. 19).

Buckingham (2003) suggests, “If media education is to help bridge the widening gap between the school and the world of children’s out-of-school experience, it must surely begin with the knowledge that children already possess” (p. 34). According to Brown (1998), a key to effective media literacy education is “respect for the individuality of every person, including each one’s distinctive upbringing” (p. 49). Brown therefore calls on teachers to “train students in the process of selective discrimination and reasoned assessment based on factual data” (p. 49). This approach takes into consideration the context of the student’s family, school, and peers, and therefore views the students as “unique persons who bring to the exercise their own past media experience” (p. 49).

Brown discourages teachers from imposing their own views, but, instead, urges them to take on the role of student mentors.

Many scholars and local media literacy organizations have joined NAMLE and other nationally recognized media literacy organizations to promote successful media literacy strategies. For example, a typical strategy used in media literacy education is “inquiry,” the act of questioning. Hobbs (1998) posits, “At the center of media literacy education must be the pedagogy of inquiry, which is the act of asking questions about media texts” (p. 27). She adds, “The cultivation of an open, questioning, reflective, and critical stance towards symbolic texts should be the pole of the media literacy umbrella, as it is the concept most likely to ensure its survival” (p. 27).
Aufderheide (1997) emphasizes the use of hands-on and experiential activities in media education (p. 80). Masterman (1997) asserts, “Teaching effectively about the media demands teaching methods which are lively, open, participatory, democratic, and as active as possible, if the aim of critical autonomy is to be achieved” (p. 45).

Semali (2000) encourages the use of analysis and interpretation in media education. “The notion of media literacy suggests a process of understanding and using different media . . . in an active and nonpassive way” (p. 4). This involves “analyzing, comparing, interpreting, and finding meaning that is different from the usual, routine, and preferred meaning” (p. 4). She explains that “preferred” meanings are found in texts that emphasize an existing interpretation or ideology and explain “why things are the way they are” (pp. 4-5). When critical media literacy is applied in reading these texts, “the reader/viewer can make an informed decision to either question the proposed premise/explanation of the media text, or to partially accept it, or even reject it completely” (p. 5).

The under-representation or misrepresentation of various segments of society in the media is now commonplace, and various media literacy organizations are encouraging individuals to challenge these institutions and their messages. Semali (2000) maintains that media literacy education helps to identify media injustice and that “students will better understand the inequalities and violations of social justice the media continue to peddle through multiple forms of imagery found in the entertainment programs and culture products that students consume everyday” (p. x).
Methodology

This qualitative study with a case study design sought to examine the development of a media literacy program in the United States and to investigate its curricular materials, instructional practices, and training seminars for teaching media literacy. NMMLP was chosen as the organization to be studied. According to Yin (2003), “Case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.”

Findings

Research Question #1

In an attempt to gain an understanding of what others believed NMMLP was, I asked the question, “What is the NMMLP, and what’s the story behind its development?” The responses indicated that this organization successfully helps individuals learn to read and understand a media text and its implications. Its goal is to train individuals to become media-literate, democratic citizens. One of the respondents emphasized that, though the organization is named “New Mexico Media Literacy Project,” their work goes beyond the boundaries of New Mexico, to other parts of the United States, and even abroad. A document from a seminar conducted by NMMLP in St. Louis in 2004 verified that the organization uses state-of-the-art multimedia, CD-ROMs, and videos to illustrate media literacy skills and issues. NMMLP shows teachers, students, parents, business people, professionals, and other citizens how media literacy can promote freedom as well as relieve cynicism, apathy, and stress (Vol. 2, p. 1).
I learned that NMMLP is also involved in research. By 2004, the organization had conducted eight research studies involving over 21,500 students. Its first media literacy CD-ROM, *Understanding Media*, contains 229 media examples (74 video clips) and covers 33 skills and media issues, as well as 400 pages of text resources. Bob McCannon, past Executive Director of NMMLP, presented to over 10,000 pediatricians in 50 different workshops for the American Academy of Pediatrics and other major medical organizations.

NMMLP has hosted several national conferences featuring highly acclaimed names in media literacy, such as Sut Jhally, Naomi Kein, Neil Postman, Bill McKibben, Danny Schecter, Robert McChesney, George Gerbner, Jane Healy, Susan Douglas, Howard Zinn, Stewart Ewen, Jim Hightower, Jean Kilbourne, and Victor Strausberger. According to NMMLP’s website, its presenters have delivered “dynamic” multimedia presentations at conferences, workshops, and classrooms across the country. Their media literacy curricular and action guides, as well as their DVD-ROMs and videos, are used in many states and abroad. Their Catalyst Institute and other training programs are credited for empowering thousands of people to be advocates and activists for a media-literate society.

The Story Behind Its Development

As I made inquiries regarding the development of NMMLP, I found that Dee Dee Downs, the daughter of NBC-TV newscaster Hugh Downs, was its founder. After having spent a great deal of time in her youth at the television studio where her father worked and after having subsequently worked 18 years herself in television production, she began to observe many inconsistencies in the media world. She felt that the media were
not fulfilling their mission of informing their viewers; instead they had become business-focused and profit-driven.

Dee Dee then resolved to leave the television industry and moved to Stockbridge, a small town in the western mountains of Massachusetts. It was here she first began to teach young people about the media in courses on television production. During this time Dee Dee discovered that young people knew nothing about the techniques used in media production. This was an eye-opener for Dee Dee, and she subsequently decided to develop a curriculum to teach students what she later learned was called “media literacy.”

The news of her work reached many media literacy proponents. She was invited by Renee Hobbs to give a presentation to her Ph.D. students at Harvard University. From this experience and subsequent invitations to many media literacy conferences, the idea of starting NMMLP was conceived.

The celebrity of Hugh Downs was largely responsible for the founding of NMMLP. Dee Dee used his name to invite top media literacy educators to present during a conference held at the University of New Mexico in March 1993. After directing this program for a short while, Dee Dee realized that administration was not her calling. Bob McCannon, media education teacher at Albuquerque Academy, a well-endowed private school located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, accepted her request to assume the directorship of the organization. NMMLP was ultimately located in Albuquerque Academy.

Bob McCannon became director of NMMLP in 1993. He conducted seminars and traveled quite extensively. The organization experienced success in various areas of work including producing and selling educational resources, such as CD-ROMs. After devoting 13 years to NMMLP, McCannon retired. Belinda Rawlins was the next
director. She was succeeded by Paula Williams. Andrea Quijada, who had served as the Director of Education at NMMLP, took over the position of Executive Director in 2008. She continues to serve as a teacher in the organization.

Research Questions #2 and #3

The next research questions were, “What processes does this organization employ in its training programs?” and “What instructional practices do the trainers use in their presentations?” NMMLP’s presenters are available to speak to schools, professional organizations, places of worship, or community groups. Their presentations may be geared to seasoned media activists as well as to young people. This organization offers numerous presentation topics. As noted on their website, some of the topics offered include: *Media Literacy 101, Media Literacy for Youth, Media and Bullying, Media and Democratic Violence, Media and Gender Stereotypes,* and *Media and Health.*

Presentations are customized for length and subject matter, depending on the needs of the requesting organization. The longer sessions usually provide opportunity for in-depth discussions and hands-on activities.

In their 4-day Catalyst Institute, NMMLP trains individuals who are qualified, upon the completion of the training program, to train others. The organization is now considering substituting another training program to better fit the changing needs of its clients. The following options are under consideration:

1. Intensive 1- and 2-day trainings in various parts of the country
2. Basic, intermediate, and advanced media literacy training programs
3. Specialized trainings for teachers, community organizers, media activists, etc.
4. Online “Webinars” on specific topics.
Updated information will be made available on the organization’s website.

NMMLP provides a Five-day Media Literacy Curriculum for students and teachers. The objective of the teachers’ version is to prepare educators to implement the curriculum in their schools. NMMLP also trains people in the area of health through its Media Literacy for Prevention curriculum. One of the most popular versions of this curriculum is its Media Literacy for Tobacco Prevention.

Each staff member at NMMLP, although given a specific title, performs multiple tasks, putting the interest of the organization above his or her own. During the interview with outgoing director Paula Williams, she mentioned she was assuming the position of assistant director in order to assist the new director, Andrea Quijada, in the transition.

NMMLP’s presentations are often customized to meet the needs and interests of the audience. It seeks to stay abreast of current issues in the media. For example, NMMLP has prepared presentations on the media’s targeting of Latinos in tobacco and alcohol ads. They have also presented on issues of interest to African-Americans, gay/lesbians, and Native Americans. Presentations on media ownership show who controls the media and how this determines the nature of the news, television programs, and advertising to which we are exposed.

NMMLP uses interactive, hands-on training activities and models to help individuals get involved experientially in the learning process. The presenters avoid telling individuals what to think. Their goal is to develop critical thinking. NMMLP aims to stay abreast of changing technologies in the curricular activities it employs. It strives to be responsive to the changing times.
Using media examples is an important training activity at NMMLP because it believes examples help foster understanding in young people, as well as adults. It was found that teamwork within the organization engenders collaboration and cooperation in accomplishing a task.

In responding to the question regarding instructional practices, the staff described those used in their Summer Catalyst Institute. Basic media concepts are introduced within the context of discussion, questioning, media examples, small-group interactions, and role-play. Those interviewed mentioned the usefulness of questioning, assessing prior knowledge, and dividing the participants into small groups. Discussion allows the presenter to ascertain the prior knowledge the group brings into the training and with what the participants would like to take away. The assessment of the prior knowledge of the participants plays a significant role in how the presenter proceeds with his or her discussion.

Research Questions #4 and #5

The final questions asked were, “What curriculum materials does this organization utilize in its training?” and “How does NMMLP select and produce materials for its training?”

Responses to these questions revealed that NMMLP uses a variety of materials in its presentations, including DVD-ROMs and CD-ROMs, with a variety of media examples, including movie clips, TV commercials, and newspaper and magazine articles. The materials used reflect the current issues of the day. Examples of such current events include the recent transition to digital television and the 2008 presidential election. Materials are sometimes produced based on the request of a funding organization such as
the New Mexico Department of Health, Tobacco Use Prevention and Control (TUPAC). Materials are sometimes selected based on the prior experience of the NMMLP team or on important issues that may have been neglected. Bullying was mentioned as one of these. Materials are produced to meet the needs of clients. It was noted that the sale of its training materials is an important source of funding for the organization.

**Discussion**

This investigation concluded that NMMLP successfully meets its objective to teach individuals to critically read and understand a media text and its implications, enabling them to become media-literate, democratic citizens. NMMLP answers the call of media literacy scholars to educate individuals to make meaningful interaction with the media sources with which they come in contact (Brunner & Tally, 1999; Massey, 2001; McLaren et al., 1995; Semali & Pailliotet, 1999).

Hobbs and Frost (1998) maintain that media literacy education works. Teacher training was found to be an important element in carrying out a successful media literacy program. However, to successfully train teachers to be media literate, more classroom resources and support in the area of media literacy education need to be provided in pre-service and in-service training (Brown, 1998; Buckingham, 1998; Tyner, 1998). Brown (1998) notes that media literacy programs have underscored the need to train teachers in the field. He calls for administrative support that would encourage teachers to enroll in comprehensive workshops to study this topic. Above all, teachers need to collaborate with their colleagues to learn more sophisticated methods to teach critical media literacy skills.
Lewis and Jhally (1998) believe that media education should be geared towards teaching students to engage the media texts and ascertain why they are created. This work is often done at NMMLP through personal involvement—hands-on performance. Its training program avoids telling individuals that an answer is right or wrong, but guides them to an equitable and sensible conclusion. Individuals bring their personal experiences into the media conversation. Such experiences are allowed to be expressed and used in addressing the various media issues. Buckingham (2003) supports this methodology, noting that, if media education is to help bridge the widening gap between the school and the world outside of it, it must surely begin with the knowledge that children already have. Brown (1998) asserts that a key to effective media literacy education is to respect each person’s individuality. This is a guiding principle of NMMLP. Although this organization claims not to have a particular theory to which they subscribe, they do have guiding principles that direct the training strategies used in their media literacy programs.

Triangulation of the three means of data collection (interviews, observation, and document research) I used in this research validated my observations regarding the strategies NMMLP employs in its training program. The pedagogical approaches used by NMMLP are well supported in the literature. For example, “inquiry” is one strategy employed in the media literacy pedagogical process. Renee Hobbs (1998) states, “At the center of media literacy education must be the pedagogy of inquiry, which is the act of asking questions about media texts” (p. 27). She adds, “The cultivation of an open, questioning, reflective, and critical stance towards symbolic texts should be the pole of the media literacy umbrella, as it is the concept most likely to ensure its survival” (p. 27).
Semali (2000) points out the importance of critical thinking skills in media education. She states, “Using critical pedagogical tools, media literacy helps students to interpret the layered meanings embedded in the stories they read and the characters they encounter in media texts” (p. 4). Semali continues,

It enables learners to question the intentions of the producer, writer, distributor, as well as the larger social context—such as history, social economic status, familiarity and comfort with the subject matter, benefits, and one’s privileged position in the culture—within which the story is created, read, and interpreted, to uncover the oppressive spaces in which difference and unequal power exist in relations of inequality and resistance. (p. 4)

Aufderheide (1997) believes that media literacy education must be hands-on and experiential (p. 80). NMMLP allows individuals to engage in hands-on and experiential activities such as role playing, deconstructing advertisements, and creating their own advertisements. This strategy is also supported by Masterman (1997) who asserts, “Teaching effectively about the media demands teaching methods which are lively, open, participatory, democratic, and as active as possible, if the aim of critical autonomy is to be achieved” (p. 45).

During NMMLP’s 2008 Summer Catalyst Institute, I found that access, analysis, evaluation, as well as the ability to communicate effectively were emphasized. It was frequently mentioned that everyone must be able to access the various media sources as a prerequisite to being able to navigate them. Once individuals are able to access the media, they can read, analyze, and evaluate the texts in order to interpret the messages being sent. I do not believe media literacy education would succeed if the above-mentioned strategies are absent. Individuals who may be considering teaching media literacy or who simply desire to understand media messages should become familiar with the strategies of media literacy education. Media literacy education, as any other
educational endeavor, embraces a systematic pedagogical framework that leads to success.

However, NMMLP has not identified a particular educational theory as a framework to guide its work. Yet, as I watched their training programs, the methods used closely resembled those advocated by many media literacy scholars and educational theorists. For example, a typical training program included many of the educational models described by Joyce et al. (1992). This was evident in the curriculum planned for teaching the deconstruction of an ad, a curriculum including demonstration or modeling of the skill, practice, and peer coaching.

The first component of successful teaching, according to Joyce et al. (1992), focuses on “knowledge” and consists of exploration of theory or rationale through discussions, readings, and lectures. This is necessary for an understanding of the concepts behind a skill or strategy and the principles that govern its use. Study of theory facilitates skill acquisition by increasing one’s understanding of the concept, by providing a mental image to guide practice and clarify feedback, and by promoting the attainment of executive control (p. 73).

Demonstration or modeling of skills is the second component. NMMLP’s trainers demonstrated the skills to be learned. DVD-ROMs with advertising clips were shown, and this was followed with the distribution of magazine clips. Numerous examples of deconstructions of advertisements were on display.

The third component is practice. Each person received deconstruction questions on the first day of the Catalyst Institute. Early on, attendees formed small groups in which each took turns practicing how to deconstruct an advertisement.
Peer coaching, the fourth component, is “the collaborative work of teachers to solve the problems or questions that arise during implementation” (Joyce et al., 1992, p. 74). As each person in the small group presented his or her media deconstruction, feedback was given and suggestions were made where improvements were needed.

Having observed these four components of successful teaching as described by Joyce et al. (1992) in the teaching strategies used by NMMLP, it was clear that this organization does, in fact, have a framework to which it unconsciously ascribes that is based on sound educational theory. It must be noted here that the pedagogical process of this organization does work. I experienced what it means to be media literate, personally, as I participated in its activities.

Conclusions

My observations of the practices of NMMLP confirmed statements made during the interviews. For example, the staff indicated NMMLP stays abreast of current issues that concern individuals or groups within our society. Because a plethora of electronic and written media focus on body image and because society continues to emphasize the “need” for women to be thin, NMMLP produced a DVD-ROM called Media and Body Image, which points out the media’s influence on society’s perception of the ideal body image. Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, and Stice (2006, as cited in Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2008) note that “body image has become an increasingly major concern of teenagers, especially females” (p. 402). Bullying has become another area of concern in our schools, and NMMLP has produced a DVD-ROM showing the media’s influence on this social phenomenon.
Visiting and interviewing the staff at NMMLP revealed quite a bit not only about the organization’s work of training individuals, but also about its responsiveness to matters affecting society. This organization stands behind its mission to promote media literacy, cultivating “critical thinking and activism in our media culture to build healthy and just communities” (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2010a, Media Literacy Project, ¶ 1).

I found networking to be a common thread in NMMLP that has sustained them from the time Dee Dee Downs started the organization to the present. Chapter 4 explored the history of this organization and enumerated the networking strategies Dee Dee Downs employed to establish NMMLP. Today, this organization continues to network. It has worked with schools, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies, some of which include the Academy of Pediatrics, National Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, etc.

NMMLP implements best practices in media literacy education as found in the Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States formulated by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). Its work implements strategies suggested by Silverblatt (2008), as well as those of Joyce et al. (1992). While NMMLP hasn’t formalized the theoretical basis from which it operates, its work demonstrates internal consistency and includes certain components of existing models.

Recommendations

1. NMMLP has stated that the organization does not subscribe to a theoretical framework to guide its educational practices. While theoretical influences were observed and documented, I would recommend, however, that they adopt or develop a formal
theoretical framework for several reasons. A theoretical framework sets the standard for the work of educational and training institutions. Deciding on a theoretical framework to support its mission statement would help NMMLP become more intentional in its focus. Since its current practice resembles many current educational theories, subscribing to or creating one would not be a difficult undertaking. Such a decision could conceivably result in the recognition of its work in the literature of the field and also the recognition of this organization as a credible member of media literacy academia.

2. One of the most successful training programs of NMMLP has been their Summer Catalyst Institute. This program has helped train many professionals throughout the country and abroad. I would recommend that they re-evaluate their decision to discontinue the Institute. Although it might be necessary to reconfigure its format, since the Institute has been a mainstay for them and has brought them name recognition, it may be in their best interest to continue this institute as they seek other avenues of reaching individuals.

3. Curriculum developers must review what theory and practice have proven to be working well and insert those practices into the curriculum. Protectionism, for example, should be dispelled and the experience of each individual should be validated. Media literacy education does not advocate teachers lecturing students. Rather, as research has shown, media literacy educators should play the role of mentors.

4. School administrators, parents, and concerned citizens who are interested in the well-being and progress of our educational system and the future of our society must lend their support to the media literacy education effort and join the conversation to bring about a desire for change.
5. Faith-based media literacy education should be an integral part of the curriculum. The *Pastoral Circle* (O’Brien, 2007, ¶ 5) is one proven approach to exploring social issues that has been applied successfully to the mass media. It provides a framework to “confront, challenge and change the way that television and all mass media touch our lives and those of our children.” Consisting of four steps—awareness, analysis, reflection, and action—this framework allows young people to explore a theme or principle, analyze the factors that influence the problem, reflect on where faith and one’s personal value system intersect, and decide what value is acceptable and the action that should follow. For positive change to be experienced in the lives of students, the *Pastoral Circle*, or a similar program, should be incorporated into the curriculum.

6. School administrators, teachers, parents, and concerned citizens need to study the example of NMMLP and adopt key components to assist local efforts in media literacy education.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Upon learning of the work of NMMLP in training educators from schools across the nation, it became apparent that a case study of one of these schools which has successfully integrated media literacy education into its curriculum would be very relevant to educators interested in establishing a media literacy program in their own institutions. By interviewing and/or observing educators, students, and their parents to ascertain how media literacy education has brought about change in the classroom, at home, and in the lives of the students, data on the impact of media literacy education could be collected for application in various school settings and levels.
Further study could be made of schools that implemented media literacy training but may have discontinued the program, comparing them to those that have been successful in implementing an ongoing media literacy curriculum. Ascertaining what factors kept the program alive or caused its demise may be useful for prospective media literacy educators as well.

A theory of media literacy education could be constructed grounded in the practices of NMMLP. Further study of its approach to media literacy education and its application of the core principles as delineated by the National Association for Media Literacy Education should aid researchers to this end.

Finally, there may be value in comparing and contrasting two media literacy organizations in the evolution of their emphases in the area of media literacy education. NMMLP has recently moved into the area of media justice. Have all media literacy organizations done likewise? In future studies, participants in the training programs could be interviewed as well as the members of the organization itself.
July 3, 2008
Ms. Andrea Quijada, Director of Education Services
New Mexico Media Literacy Project
6400 Wyoming Blvd.
NE Albuquerque, NM 87109

Dear Ms. Quijada:

I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education of Andrews University currently working on a dissertation on media literacy. The study I am conducting is a qualitative case study of a media literacy organization.

The purpose of this research is to understand the history and development, as well as the training processes employed in a media literacy organization. The data collection methods I have chosen to use include interviews, observations, website and document evaluation, as well as review of media literacy videos.

After identifying the elements I wanted to be present in the entity I wished to study, I concluded that the New Mexico Media Literacy Project met all the criteria I wanted to include. Therefore, I am kindly requesting your permission to interview you and other key individuals in your organization, observe your process of training individuals in media literacy, and review documents—videos, curriculum, etc.—associated with your work.

Thank you kindly for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Respectfully,

Sam Nkana
Graduate Student
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS

Andrews University

Informed Consent Form

Title: Media Literacy: A Case Analysis of Instructional Practices of a Media Literacy Organization in the Southwest.

Purpose of Study: I understand that the purpose of this study is to discover describe the history and background of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, an established media literacy organization. In addition, this study aims to explore the processes and techniques adopted by this organization in training individuals to implement principles of media literacy in various settings.

Inclusion Criteria: In order to participate, I recognize that I must be an adult between the ages of 18 and above, and of sound mind.

Procedure: I understand that I will be interviewed using the research and interview questions aligned with the purpose of this study. I also understand that this informed consent form will be distributed by the researcher at the time when most of the observations and interviews are done. My signature will be secured before the interview process begins and during the interview the researcher may sometimes tape record these one-on-one sessions. Once transcribed, the record of each interview will be coded with a pseudonym, filed in notebooks, and referenced when needed. Only the researcher will have access to the informed consent forms and the interview data once it has been transcribed.

Risks and Discomforts: I have been informed that there are no physical or emotional risks to my involvement in this study.

Benefits/Results: This study will bring awareness to schools, churches, youth groups, etc. of the existence of media literacy programs in United States. In addition, those interested in starting media literacy training programs will be informed on how to possibly proceed. Furthermore, it will help individuals learn how to evaluate their media choices and understand the underlying values.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my involvement in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any pressure, embarrassment, or negative impact on me.
Confidentiality: I understand that confidentiality is assured in this study. Whereas the researcher will know the names of those who have signed the informed consent, pseudonyms will be used in the completed dissertation, and the organization and all participants in this study will remain anonymous.

Contact Information: In the event that I have any questions or concerns with regard to my participation in this research project, I understand that I may contact the researcher Sam Nkana at asnkana@hotmail.com (Tel: (423) 503-5286), his adviser, Dr. Larry D. Burton, Professor in Curriculum and Instruction program at burton@andrews.edu (Tel: (269) 471-6674). I have been given a copy of this form for my records.

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Subject                             Date

__________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Witness                             Date

Signed at: ________________________________________________
Respondents’ Consent Form Amendment

I, ____________________________, a staff member of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, hereby declare:

1. That I give my consent to Sam Nkana, an Andrews University doctoral student, to use my real name in his dissertation.

2. That I have read and approved the responses included in this research as accurate and represent my input in the final project.

3. I understand, therefore, that no changes shall be made to my final approved comments without prior written consent from me.

______________________________  __________________
Respondent                       Date
Respondents’ Consent Form Amendment

I, __________________________, a former director of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, hereby declare:

1. That I give my consent to Sam Nkana, an Andrews University doctoral student, to use my real name in his dissertation.

2. That I have read and approved the responses included in this research as accurate and represent my input in the final project.

3. I understand, therefore, that no changes shall be made to my final approved comments without prior written consent from me.

___________________________________  __________________
Respondent                          Date
Respondents’ Consent Form Amendment

I, ___________________________, the founder of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, hereby declare:

1. That I give my consent to Sam Nkana, an Andrews University doctoral student, to use my real name in his dissertation.

2. That I have read and approved the responses included in this research as accurate and represent my input in the final project.

3. I understand, therefore, that no changes shall be made to my final approved comments without prior written consent from me.

___________________________________  __________________
Respondent                          Date
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Andrews University
School of Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Interview Questions

Below are the interview questions listed in the order they are likely to be asked. The questions are both specific and open-ended. Additional questions arising from the open-ended questions will remain within the framework of the approval granted for this research.

1. What is the New Mexico Media Literacy project? What is the story behind its development?

2. Could you describe your role in this organization?

3. Can you describe your training program?

4. What theory and processes are utilized in the design of the training program?

5. What curricular activities do you find to be useful in this venture? And why?

6. What instructional practices do you use in the training presentations?

7. What successes and challenges have you encountered in the training program?

8. Do you feel that the organization has accomplished its goals?

9. Are there other goals this organization wishes to fulfill?

10. What metaphor would you use to describe your program?
11. What curriculum materials are utilized in the training program?

12. How does this organization select and produce materials for its training?

13. How does this organization support trainees to transfer new skills into their environment?
APPENDIX D

NAMLE CORE PRINCIPLES

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

CORE PRINCIPLES OF MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION in the UNITED STATES

The purpose of media literacy education is to help individuals of all ages develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens in today’s world.

www.NAMLE.net
INTRODUCTION

NAMLE is excited to offer to educators, advocates and allies these Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States. In crafting them, the writers have built upon previous scholarship in media literacy as well as communications, education, media and film studies, public health and psychology.

We honor those who provided this rich intellectual heritage while also recognizing that much has changed in the decades since the term "media literacy" first came into use. In responding to those changes, this document shifts the focus of the discussion from what we believe to be true about media to what we believe to be true about how people learn to think critically. It expands the boundaries of the field to encompass not only what we teach but also how we teach, thereby distinguishing these as Core Principles of "media literacy education" rather than solely as key concepts of "media literacy."

We believe that these Core Principles articulate a common ground around which media literacy educators and advocates can coalesce. NAMLE is committed to using the Core Principles as a springboard for vibrant and ongoing dialogue, and as a first step in the development of clear, measurable outcomes and benchmarks for U.S. schools. We invite you to actively join in that conversation at events like the National Media Education Conference and online at www.NAMLE.net.

This version of the Core Principles primarily addresses classroom teachers in the United States. The "Implications for Practice" section is written with them in mind. Our intention is that future versions of the document will be developed to meet the needs of the wide range of media literacy education practitioners outside the pre-K-12 classroom, including parents, professors, counselors, artists, media professionals, and more.

Throughout this document, “MLE” will be used as an abbreviation for media literacy education.

This document was developed by the following past and present AMLA Board members: Lynda Bergsma, David Considine, Sherri Hope Culver, Renee Hobbs, Amy Jensen, Faith Rogow, Elana Yonah Rosen, Cyndy Scheibe, Sharon Sellers-Clark, and Elizabeth Thoman

In crafting this document, these authors drew from the work of:

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1. Media Literacy Education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1.1 The process of effective media analysis is based on the following concepts:
   1.1a All media messages are “constructed.”
   1.1b Each medium has different characteristics, strengths, and a unique “language” of construction.
   1.1c Media messages are produced for particular purposes.
   1.1d All media messages contain embedded values and points of view.
   1.1e People use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.
   1.1f Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process.

1.2 MLE teaches students to ask the specific types of questions that will allow them to gain a deeper or more sophisticated understanding of media messages.

The accompanying appendix - “Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages” - provides a model of such questions. Because instructional practices must be modified appropriately for learners of different ages and in different settings, the process of critical questioning and the specific wording of questions may vary. Some questions may not apply to every media message, and questions will often have more than one answer. As with all critical questioning processes, the end goal is to enable students to regularly ask the questions themselves.

1.3 MLE emphasizes strong sense critical thinking, i.e., asking questions about all media messages, not just those with which we may disagree.

1.4 MLE trains students to use document-based evidence and well-reasoned arguments to support their conclusions.

1.5 MLE is not about replacing students’ perspectives with someone else’s (your own, a teacher’s, a media critic’s, an expert’s, etc.). Sharing a critique of media without also sharing the skills that students need to critically analyze media for themselves is not sound MLE practice. This includes presenting media literacy videos, films, books or other curriculum materials as a substitute for teaching critical inquiry skills.

1.6 MLE teachers do not train students to ask IF there is a bias in a particular message (since all media messages are biased), but rather, WHAT the substance, source, and significance of a bias might be.

1.7 For MLE teachers, fostering critical thinking is routine. MLE calls for institutional structures to support their efforts by actively encouraging critical thinking in all classrooms.

1.8 Simply using media in the classroom does not constitute MLE.

2. Media Literacy Education expands the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

2.1 Like print literacy, which requires both reading and writing, MLE encompasses both analysis and expression.

2.2 MLE enables students to express their own ideas through multiple forms of media (e.g., traditional print, electronic, digital, user-generated, and wireless) and helps students make connections between comprehension and inference-making in print, visual, and audio media.

2.3 MLE takes place in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to: schools, after school programs, online, universities & colleges, religious institutions, and the home.

2.4 MLE should be taught across the pre-K-12 curriculum. It can be integrated into nearly any subject area.

2.5 MLE welcomes the use of a broad range of media “texts,” including popular media.

2.6 MLE recognizes that evolving media forms, societal changes, and institutional structures require ever new instructional approaches and practices.

2.7 Effective MLE requires classrooms to be equipped with the tools to both analyze and produce media.

2.8 MLE intersects with other literacies, i.e., is distinct from but shares many goals and techniques with print, visual, technology, information, and other literacies.

2.9 As a literacy, MLE may have political consequences, but it is not a political movement; it is an educational discipline.

2.10 While MLE may result in students wanting to change or reform media, MLE itself is not focused on changing media, but rather on changing educational practice and increasing students’ knowledge and skills.
3. Media Literacy Education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
3.1 Media literacy is not a “have it or not” competency, but rather an ever evolving continuum of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and actions.
3.2 The requirements of MLE cannot be addressed by a single event, class, day or even week-long intervention. Rather, MLE teachers seek to provide students with numerous and diverse opportunities to practice and develop skills of analysis and expression.
3.3 MLE engages students with varied learning styles.
3.4 MLE is most effective when used with co-learning pedagogies, in which teachers learn from students and students learn from teachers and from classmates.
3.5 MLE builds skills that encourage healthy lifestyles and decision making; it is not about inoculating people against presumed or actual harmful media effects.
3.6 MLE teaches media management in a way that helps students learn to make informed decisions about time spent using media and which media they choose to use.
3.7 Making decisions for other people about media access or content is not MLE.

4. Media Literacy Education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
4.1 MLE promotes student interest in news and current events as a dimension of citizenship, and can enhance student understanding of First Amendment rights and responsibilities.
4.2 MLE is designed to create citizens who are skeptical, not cynical.
4.3 MLE gives students the skills they need to take responsibility for their own media use.
4.4 MLE invites and respects diverse points of view.
4.5 MLE explores representations, misrepresentations and lack of representation of cultures and countries in the global community.
4.6 MLE values independently produced media.
4.7 MLE trains students to examine how media structures (e.g., ownership, distribution, etc.) influence the ways that people make meaning of media messages.
4.8 MLE recognizes that HOW we teach matters as much as WHAT we teach. Classrooms should be places where student input is respected, valued and acted upon.
4.9 MLE is not partisan.
4.10 MLE is not a substitute for government regulation of media, nor is government regulation a substitute for MLE.
4.11 Censorship or other efforts aimed at keeping selected media beyond the access of selected audiences do not achieve the skill-building goals of MLE.
4.12 MLE is not a substitute for media meeting their responsibility to serve the public interest. At the same time it is not about media bashing, i.e., simplistic, rhetorical, or over-generalized attacks on some types of media or media industries as a whole.
5. Media Literacy Education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

5.1 MLE integrates media texts that present diverse voices, perspectives and communities.
5.2 MLE includes opportunities to examine alternative media and international perspectives.
5.3 MLE addresses topics like violence, gender, sexuality, racism, stereotyping and other issues of representation.
5.4 MLE shares with media owners, producers, and members of the creative community responsibility for facilitating mutual understanding of the effects of media on individuals and on society.
5.5 MLE does not start from a premise that media are inconsequential nor that media are a problem.
5.6 MLE does not excuse media makers from their responsibility as members of the community to make a positive contribution and avoid doing harm.

6. Media Literacy Education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE:**

6.1 MLE is not about teaching students what to think; it is about teaching them how they can arrive at informed choices that are most consistent with their own values.
6.2 MLE helps students become aware of and reflect on the meaning that they make of media messages, including how the meaning they make relates to their own values.
6.3 MLE is not about revealing to students the “true” or “correct” or “hidden” meaning of media messages, nor is it about identifying which media messages are “good” and which ones are “bad.” In MLE, media analysis is an exploration of riches, rather than “right” readings.
6.4 MLE recognizes that students’ interpretations of media texts may differ from the teacher’s interpretation without being wrong.
6.5 MLE recognizes and welcomes the different media experiences of individuals of varying ages.
6.6 MLE uses group discussion and analysis of media messages to help students understand and appreciate different perspectives and points of view.
6.7 MLE facilitates growth, understanding and appreciation through an examination of tastes, choices and preferences.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN ANALYZING MEDIA MESSAGES</th>
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<td><strong>AUTHORSHIP</strong></td>
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<td>Who made this message?</td>
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<td><strong>PURPOSE</strong></td>
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<td>Why was this made?</td>
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<td>Who is the target audience (and how do you know)?</td>
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<td><strong>ECONOMICS</strong></td>
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<td>Who paid for this?</td>
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<td><strong>IMPACT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Who might benefit from this message?</td>
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<td>Who might be harmed by it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why might this message matter to me?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What kinds of actions might I take in response to this message?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MESSAGES &amp; MEANINGS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONTENT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is this about (and what makes you think that)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What ideas, values, information, and/or points of view are overt? Implied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is left out of this message that might be important to know?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TECHNIQUES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What techniques are used?</td>
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<td>Why were those techniques used?</td>
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<td>How do they communicate the message?</td>
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<td><strong>INTERPRETATIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might different people understand this message differently?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is my interpretation of this and what do I learn about myself from my reaction or interpretation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REPRESENTATIONS &amp; REALITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONTEXT</strong></td>
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<td>When was this made?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where or how was it shared with the public?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CREDIBILITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this fact, opinion, or something else?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How credible is this (and what makes you think that)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the sources of the information, ideas, or assertions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCE LIST


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A. Sam Nkana

Experience

2004-2005  Bella Vista Adventist Academy  Mayaguez, PR
Teacher
- Taught high school courses: English, American Literature, British Literature, and Grammar.
- Involved students in critical media literacy education.

2002-2003  Southern Adventist University  Collegedale, TN
Assistant Professor
- Courses taught: Fund Development, Non-Profit Organizations, Intro to Public Speaking, Public Relations Principles and Ethics

1999-2002  Bella Vista Adventist Academy  Mayaguez, PR
Teacher
- Taught high school courses: English, American Literature, British Literature, and Grammar.
- Developed a video productions and communications curriculum for the academy.
- Taught students to shoot video footage, edit, and dub in audio to final cut.
- Produced video yearbook for the school.

Education

1999-2010  Andrews University  Berrien Springs, MI
- Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction

1978-1981  West Virginia University  Morgantown, WV
- M.S. in Journalism, Concentration: Public Relations

1977  West Virginia University  Morgantown, WV
- B.S. in Journalism, Concentration: Public Relations, Minor: Speech Communication

Research Related Activities

Parental Involvement: An Overview of Advantages of Parental Involvement in Students’ Education

Block Scheduling: A Problem or A Solution

Strategies for Making Seventh-day Adventist Education More Accessible: An Evaluation Report

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