

Washington University in St. Louis
Washington University Open Scholarship

All Theses and Dissertations (ETDs)

January 2010

Teaching News Literacy in the Age Of New Media: Why Secondary School Students Should Be Taught to Judge the Credibility of the News They Consume

Elia Powers

Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Powers, Elia, "Teaching News Literacy in the Age Of New Media: Why Secondary School Students Should Be Taught to Judge the Credibility of the News They Consume" (2010). *All Theses and Dissertations (ETDs)*. 455.
<https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/etd/455>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

University College

Department of American Culture Studies

TEACHING NEWS LITERACY IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA:

**Why Secondary School Students Should Be Taught to Judge
the Credibility of the News They Consume**

By

Elia Michael Powers

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

August 2010

Saint Louis, Missouri

ABSTRACT

This paper involves two of the oldest institutions in America -- schools and the press -- and the preparation of informed citizens in the age of new media. I examine the manner and ways in which news literacy, the use of critical thinking skills to judge the reliability of news reports and news sources, is taught to secondary school students in the United States. It is axiomatic that a vigorous and independent press is critical to our democracy. Yet news literacy has not historically been included in the public school curriculum and continues to be widely absent, despite states vowing through their educational standards to graduate media literate students. News literacy is of increasing significance as the media sources from which citizens can obtain news and public affairs information continue to expand, and as people increasingly report being overwhelmed by the amount of information available online. Individual teachers, college faculty and a range of organizations run by media professionals have championed news literacy in recent years. In the following paper, I highlight these efforts to integrate news literacy lessons in the classroom, as well as the institutional barriers to broadening students' access to news literacy instruction.

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. DEFINING NEWS LITERACY 6

III. WHY NEWS LITERACY IS IMPORTANT 9

IV. WHY NEWS LITERACY SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS 11

 a. The increase of news in the digital information age 12

 b. Young Americans can be taught to evaluate content they so readily
 encounter online 13

 c. Secondary school students are particularly prone to undervalue access
 to reliable news 20

 d. Reaching the broadest group who can benefit from news literacy
 for the longest time 22

V. HISTORY OF THE MEDIA/NEWS LITERACY MOVEMENTS..... 24

VI. BARRIERS TO NEWS LITERACY’S INCLUSION IN SCHOOL CURRICULA..... 31

 a. Competition for class time in the era of achievement standards 31

 b. Lack of teacher familiarity with news literacy curricula 35

 c. Overcoming skepticism and indifference 39

 d. Political sensitivities in teaching news literacy 41

 e. Inadequate classroom access to relevant media technology 44

VII. FINDING A PLACE IN EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS..... 45

 a. Recognition by education organizations of news literacy’s importance 45

 b. Some states have addressed standards for media and news literacy 49

 c. Inadequate resources impede efforts to deliver news literacy instruction 53

 d. The need to cover news and media literacy on state assessments 54

Table of Contents (cont'd)

VIII. A BOTTOM-UP MOVEMENT	56
a. Fitting news literacy into the existing curriculum.....	56
b. Teachers who have integrated news literacy into their classrooms	59
c. The journalist as a teacher of news literacy	61
IX. ELEMENTS COMMON TO NEWS LITERACY CURRICULA	67
X. CONCLUSION	81
XI. RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS	83
XII. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	86

I. INTRODUCTION

Lucy Chen, a junior at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, Maryland, is among the throngs of students each year who take Advanced Placement United States Government. In this course at the nationally ranked public school, students like Chen learn about many of the institutions that define the American political system and that tend to dominate the political science curriculum: Congress and interest groups, the presidency, and the courts. What sets this course apart from the rest is that during each of these three units, a visiting journalist who has covered the institution under discussion speaks to the class not only about the process of reporting on government but about the importance of seeking out reliable, well-sourced news at a time when the amount of electronic information available is swelling.

Like many young people, Chen mainly gets her news online. After hearing from the journalists and her teacher talk about the ways in which news consumers can gauge the credibility of what they read, Chen said she now pays more attention to the kinds of sources she turns to for information. Now her goal is to help other students identify whether they are adept at finding reliable news or are likely to absorb poor-quality information along with the good. For her final project in the government course, Chen focused on two questions: “How can students know what to believe?” and “What challenges and opportunities do the Internet and digital media pose?” She created a quiz in the form of a choose-your-own-path flow chart that starts by asking students whether they typically turn to CNN, Wikipedia or Facebook for their news. Chen then poses a range of questions: “TMZ.com says Britney [Spears] is pregnant...once again. Do you believe it?” “When looking up your school on Wikipedia, you find that your principal was supposedly a stripper in the ‘70s – do you start spreading the rumors?” Depending on students’ answers, they are eventually funneled to one

of two groups, “Silly” and “Savvy.” As Chen notes in the text that accompanied the final project,

If the person is deemed silly, then it was more likely that he/she would choose the response that would lead to an ignorant reaction to a false statement by the media; whereas if the person is deemed savvy, then he/she chose the response that would lead to an informed and inquisitive reaction to the media’s allegations (Chen).

The quiz teaches students to avoid claims that seem too good to be true, and to question everything, including the source of their information. “The Internet has been praised for its ability to spread information quickly to a massive amount of people, but its diversity and accessibility can also become dangerous if the audience is not savvy” (Chen).

The ability to access and analyze news coverage has long been a vital part of being an engaged American citizen. Students like Chen who learn these critical-thinking skills and news consumption habits at a young age are equipped to become well-informed members of society. Secondary school classrooms are potentially effective settings to teach a significant number of people about the central position that the news media occupies in American cultural life. Nowhere else can you find access to a large, captive audience that represents such a broad cross-section of the population. Targeting middle and high school students is also wise because these are the years when many people begin developing their reading and viewing routines.

The press’s role as educator is often overlooked throughout American history. Even before formal schooling became the norm for American families, town newspapers provided those who could afford and access them with daily lessons about politics, commerce and leisure. Editorial decisions about what to cover and feature on the front page provided townspeople with a measure of what was deemed important in community life. Carlos E. Cortes, professor emeritus of history at the University of California-Riverside, writes that throughout history the news media have served as teachers, whether intentionally or not, and

audiences learn from the media whether or not they realize it. Journalists, he writes, “present information, organize ideas, disseminate values, create and reinforce expectations and provide models for behavior” (qtd. in Schwartz 55). Publishers have historically relished their role as information gatekeepers and used the editorial pages of their newspapers as a forum to express political convictions and provide commentary on current events from influential thinkers. The press has long helped set the national agenda and has contributed to the formation of a collective identity.

Today, news is accessible not only through newspapers, television sets, and radios but also through computers, mobile phones, digital music players, and hybrid electronic devices. With information so widely available across media platforms, the press’s role as educator has never been more significant. Howard Schneider, dean of the journalism school at Stony Brook University and a news literacy proponent, argues that “the press is the biggest school of continuing education in the world” (Schneider and Klurfeld). Young people have grown up online and are accustomed to getting their news from various media sources. They are encountering a news environment that looks much different than the one their parents – or even older siblings -- are accustomed to seeing. Newspapers and print magazines across the country have lost readers, shrunk in size, cut back their staffs and put an increasing emphasis on attracting an online audience. Network television news programs have lost viewers to the more opinion-based programs that appear on cable channels. Resources for investigative reporting and international coverage have broadly declined. Meanwhile, nontraditional news sources like blogs, wiki pages, and user-generated video channels are increasing. There are more ways than ever before to find content and more uncertainty than ever about whether news sources – both traditional and otherwise – are providing credible information.

Changes in the way Americans get their news make it increasingly important for news consumers to develop literacy skills that allow them to weigh the value of what they

read, see, and hear. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) defines literacy as “a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy” (NCTE). A pertinent definition of new literacies, “the skills, strategies and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and content that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives,” comes from the book *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (Ruddell and Unrau 1972).

The notion of literacy has evolved along with and been shaped by the news media. The presence of an influential newspaper motivated elite white males (the core base of readers during Colonial America) to become literate so they could follow local happenings, understand public policy arguments and be active participants in town meetings. As the country grew, a more diverse citizenry depended on an expanding number and scope of publications as the only reliable source of information about events taking place in other cities, states, and countries. Literacy, in this context, was the ability to read and analyze printed text. But the advent of broadcast media and the recent explosion of digital media prompted media educators to expand their definition of what it means to be a literate news consumer. Tessa Jolls and Elizabeth Thoman, the president and founder, respectively, of the Center for Media Literacy, argue that it is no longer enough for students to be able to read the printed word. They need to be able to interpret different forms of media (Thoman and Jolls 4). Steve Goodman of the nonprofit youth media organization Educational Video Center agrees that there needs to be an expanded definition of literacy:

Learning to read and write is still essential, but is no longer sufficient in a world where television, radio, movies, videos, magazines and the world wide web have all become powerful and pervasive sites for public education and literacy. Students need to develop a critical literacy to read this broad array of media (4).

And as the NCTE document broadly states, “Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies,” including reading online newspapers, creating and evaluating other multi-media texts, and synthesizing multiple streams of simultaneous information (NCTE).

It is axiomatic that a vigorous and independent press is critical to the country’s health. But to thrive in a rapidly changing environment, news organizations and individual journalists providing thoughtful, well-sourced content must have substantial audiences who appreciate the attributes of their work that promote credibility and its contribution to a functioning democracy. Young people increasingly report being overwhelmed by the amount of news sources and content available online. Yet, while states vow through their educational standards to graduate media literate students, news literacy instruction continues to be widely absent from the classroom. In this paper, I make the case for the widespread inclusion of news literacy curricula in middle and high schools, describe the institutional barriers to broadening students’ access to news literacy instruction, and highlight efforts already underway that integrate such lessons in the classroom. As instrumental media educator David Buckingham writes,

It is quite extraordinary that the majority of young people should go through their school careers with so little opportunity to study and engage with the most significant contemporary forms of culture and communication. Clearly, there is an argument here that still needs to be made (x).

Because news literacy is such a new field of study, there is little scholarly work that argues for the inclusion of school curricula that train students to be discerning consumers of information. Supporters of news-literacy education are in the midst of developing resources for teachers, training educators from across the country, and selling school officials on the merits of their work. For this paper, I conducted the majority of my research by interviewing

the professors, secondary school teachers, and nonprofit leaders who are championing news literacy. In July 2010 I visited New York's Stony Brook University, which recently created a Center for News Literacy. While there, I observed professors training a group of teachers, librarians, and graduate students how to integrate news literacy lessons into their classrooms and workplaces. The curricula being developed by these professors and other groups are among the primary documents I cite in this paper. In addition to arguing for the importance of news literacy education in secondary schools, I am using this paper to examine the ongoing efforts of educators to promote this nascent field.

II. DEFINING NEWS LITERACY

Before exploring the importance of news literacy, it is necessary to define the term and distinguish it from the broader and more widely used term media literacy.¹ The most commonly agreed-upon baseline definition for media literacy, "the ability to access, analyze and produce information," comes from the 1992 National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy. Although this definition often serves as the starting point for those within the field, arguments continue over the term's meaning (Schwartz and Brown 11). Len Masterman, one of the earliest and most influential media scholars, writes that debates about how to define media literacy will inevitably continue. "How is it possible to make any conceptual sense of a field which covers such a wide range and diversity of forms, practices and products, such as film, television, radio, popular music, advertising, newspapers and magazines?" (18).

The media literacy movement has long sought to teach people how to critically analyze content across a wide range of media platforms. The Alliance for a Media Literate

¹ While this paper focuses on news literacy, some reference is made throughout to media literacy, when this term is used by the source. This is done only when the information provided applies to the news literacy component of the larger field.

America, now known as the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), in 2007 published its core principles of media literacy education. The consensus report states that all media messages contain embedded values and points of view, and that media literacy education requires active inquiry and critical thinking. The report argues that media literacy education should be taught across the K-12 curriculum in every place that traditional print literacy is traditionally taught (NAMLE).

News literacy is a branch of media literacy. Schneider, the journalism dean who has taught a course on news literacy to undergraduates at Stony Brook University, provides a particularly useful definition of the term: “The ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports, whether they come via print, television or the Internet” (Schneider and Klurfeld). While media literacy courses tend to focus on the impact of media messages on society and individuals, Stony Brook’s news literacy course focuses more narrowly on the role of the press in society. Dean Miller, director of the three-year-old Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook, also teaches the course on news literacy. He says that news literacy is,

quite narrowly focused on those skills required for a person to find and sort the material necessary for their civic life. It is in essence a course that focuses on helping students finding reliable information that is used to take action or make a judgment. Should I get the H1N1 vaccination? Should I vote for Obama or McCain? (D. Miller).

Jolls, the Center for Media Literacy president, said news literacy is not a term that gets used often in public discourse. “It is not valued as a separate discipline at all” (Jolls). Art Silverblatt, a media literacy professor at Webster University, agrees that news literacy is a term that is not widely known among the general population. This view is commonly held among those who are working to promote news literacy as a widely accepted course of study.

Alan Miller, director of the nonprofit group News Literacy Project,² which organizes the program that brings journalists to Whitman High and other schools, agrees that news literacy is a nascent field that is an offshoot of media literacy and that still has a low profile. The definition of news literacy is still evolving, according to Miller. He thinks of it primarily as acquiring “the critical thinking skills to be able to create and consume credible information.”

Schneider has created a list of key skills and concepts that students in news literacy courses should master. Students need to: 1) recognize the difference between journalism and other kinds of information, and between journalists and other information purveyors; 2) in the context of journalism, recognize the difference between news and opinion; 3) in the context of news stories, analyze the difference between assertion and verification and between evidence and inference; 4) evaluate and “deconstruct” news reports based on the quality of evidence presented and the reliability of sources; and 5) distinguish between news media bias and audience bias. The key concepts include the ability to 1) appreciate the power of reliable information and the importance of a free flow of information in a democratic society; 2) understand the nature and mission of the American press and its relationship with the government; compare and contrast this to other systems around the world; 3) understand how journalists work and make decisions and why they make mistakes; 4) understand how the digital revolution and the structural changes in the news media can affect news consumers; and 5) understand why news matters and why becoming a more discerning news consumer can change their own lives and the life of the country (Schneider, “News Literacy Outcomes”

1). Elements common to many of the existing news literacy curricula are further described throughout this paper and summarized in chapter X.

² The Maryland-based News Literacy Project is an organization established in 2008 by Miller, a former *Los Angeles Times* investigative reporter.

There is considerable disagreement both within academic circles and among media consumers over what is deemed “news,” including the question of whether the term should apply to “infotainment programs and publications that include public affairs along with lifestyle, crime and celebrity offerings” (Patterson, “Young People” 5). For the purpose of this paper, I define news as information supplied from a dispassionate source that helps citizens to more effectively participate in civic life.

III. WHY NEWS LITERACY IS IMPORTANT

Teaching Americans news literacy skills is central to maintaining a strong democracy. Citizens need accurate information to form opinions about a wide range of issues affecting choices about representation in government and policy. But having large quantities of information readily available does not insure that people will become truly informed. Citizens need to know how to determine the value of the barrage of information coming their way under the guise of news if they are to use it to make informed decisions. In a May 2010 speech delivered at the University of Michigan, President Barack Obama said the following, underscoring the importance of seeking out trustworthy information from a variety of sources:

Today’s 24/7 echo-chamber amplifies the most inflammatory sound bites louder and faster than ever before. And it’s also, however, given us unprecedented choice ... If we choose to actively seek out information that challenges our assumptions and our beliefs, perhaps we can begin to understand where the people who disagree with us are coming from. Now, this requires us to agree on a certain set of facts to debate from. That’s why we need a vibrant and thriving news business that is separate from opinion makers and talking heads. That’s why we need an educated citizenry that values hard evidence and not just assertion (Obama).

Highlighting the connection between news literacy and a democratic society, David Considine, a professor of instructional technology and media studies at Appalachian State University writes,

One of the most consistent goals pervading all American education is the desire to create responsible citizens for a democratic society. Clearly, such a goal must embrace information skills and critical thinking. Responsible citizens must be able to access, analyze and evaluate information in a variety of forms, both print and nonprint (qtd. in Kubey, “Information Age” 259).

The Elements of Journalism, a pre-eminent journalism textbook, begins by asking the question: What is journalism for? Its answer: “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 17). Similarly, a recent report from the Knight Commission on Information Needs of Communities called “Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age” states that journalistic institutions that have traditionally served democracy by promoting values of openness, accountability, and public engagement are in crisis, and that there is reason to be anxious about the consequences for democratic governance. The report argues that “the time has come for new thinking and aggressive action to dramatically improve the information opportunities available to the American people, the information health of the country’s communities, and the information vitality of our democracy” (Knight Commission). It continues that,

America needs ‘informed communities,’ places where the information ecology meets people’s personal and civic information needs. This means people have the news and information they need to take advantage of life’s opportunities for themselves and their families. They need information to participate fully in our system of self-government, to stand up and be heard.

For a community to be healthy, journalism needs to be abundant in many forms, and “as a way to enhance the information capacity of individuals,” digital and media literacy should be “included as critical elements of education at all levels through collaboration among federal, state and local education officials” (Knight Commission).

Concerns about the quality of information presented as news stem not only from the ever-growing number of sources, but also from challenges facing news organizations to maintain high journalistic standards that protect the vigor and independence of the news reporting and writing process. Maintaining such standards requires human resources that are

costly and can survive only if the public is willing to bear the cost of high-quality, in-depth public affairs journalism. The claim that “journalistic institutions that have traditionally served democracy by promoting values of openness, accountability, and public engagement are in crisis” is widely accepted by practicing journalists and journalism educators. Schneider, a former editor of the Long Island, New York, daily *Newsday*, said journalists used to assume that “if you do good journalism, people will recognize it and sustain it. And yet what we can see in recent years is that isn’t necessarily the case.” One of his goals is to require that every undergraduate at Stony Brook take the news literacy course, because,

I don’t believe we’ll be able to support a robust press unless we build an audience that will recognize the difference between journalism that matters and journalism that’s junk; that recognizes the difference between news, propaganda, entertainment, publicity, advertising and raw information, and unless we get an audience that can support quality journalism, appreciates quality journalism and sustains quality journalism, we won’t have the kind of press in this country we need (Schneider and Klurfeld).

As he told participants in the Center for News Literacy’s 2010 institute for teachers, “It is no longer sufficient to just train journalists. We have to address consumers – the demand side of the equation” (Schneider, address).³

IV. WHY NEWS LITERACY SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The primary reasons to teach news literacy as part of the secondary school curriculum are as follows: (1) The sources and volume of information posing as news have vastly increased in the digital age; (2) while middle and high school students are inexperienced in identifying the attributes of unreliable information, they are among the most avid consumers of content delivered through new media platforms, a habit likely to be carried into adulthood; (3) these students are particularly prone to undervalue the importance of the free flow of

³ The lecture was delivered on July 12, 2010 at Stony Brook University.

reliable information; and (4) efforts to develop a news literate population will have the greatest impact when the necessary skills are taught to the widest possible audience – school-aged students who represent a cross-section of the population.

a. The increase of news and other information in the digital age

In October 2008, dozens of journalists, journalism educators and high school students met in Philadelphia for a conference called “Rebooting the News: Reconsidering an Agenda for American Civic Education.” Attendees discussed the definition of news literacy, efforts to teach students about the importance of finding credible sources of information, and ways to get past the roadblocks for expanding the reach of news-literacy instruction. As a way of framing their work at the three-day conference, participants signed a consensus statement saying that, “Because news surrounds us, news literacy is an essential life skill for everyone” (“Rebooting the News”).

Once available through newspapers printed daily, then via radio or television broadcasts providing concise summaries of events, news now emanates from an ever-expanding variety of media sources, many of which are accessible twenty-four hours a day. Newspapers publish online with ever-changing content. Cable television news channels inundate viewers with constantly updated breaking news and analysis around the clock. Traditional news organizations are now joined by nontraditional web-based sources such as blogs, wiki pages, and user-generated video sites. Many Americans receive news throughout the day with little, if any, active involvement in selecting the source. News organizations text or e-mail headlines to readers and news aggregation sites like Google News and Digg automatically assemble information from a wide variety of sources with little transparency in how reliability is considered. Social networking sites like Facebook allow users to suggest articles to friends and comment on posted stories. These media platforms are within easy reach of anyone with a wired computer or mobile device, which is an increasingly large

portion of the population.⁴ News is difficult to avoid – it is played on screens in the backseat of taxis and on airplanes; it creeps across the bottom of television sets in bars and restaurants and at work. As the Philadelphia conference participants agreed, “News surrounds us.” And the importance of news literacy increases as the sources from which citizens can obtain news and public affairs information continue to expand.

In this rapidly changing media environment, many people report feeling inundated with information and unsure of where to find reliable content. A 2010 survey from the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project showed that 70 percent of news consumers agreed with the statement “the amount of news and information available from different sources today is overwhelming.” The vast majority of 2,000-plus respondents over the age of 18 said they believe most news sources are “biased” (Purcell 5).

b. Young Americans can be taught to evaluate content they so readily encounter online

While young people are accustomed to turning to the Internet for information, they are not well-equipped to make the best use of what they find. A 2009 report from the Newspaper Association of America Foundation and the Media Management Center at Northwestern University found that young news consumers “express feelings of being bombarded by options, of always having to prioritize because they do not have enough time to do everything they want.” Young people “frequently get a ‘too much’ feeling from the news and quickly click away. That’s triggered by having too many things competing for their attention, too many details, too much text and stories that are too long or too difficult to understand” (“Teens Know” 3). A first-person account comes from Erin Griffin, who was a

⁴ The “digital divide,” a term often used to reference the gap between those who have reliable access to digital technology and those who do not, applies to all age groups. For instance, secondary school students from lower socioeconomic classes or from rural areas are on balance less likely to be able to access the media technologies described above.

high school junior in Chicago when she wrote the forward to the book “Media Literacy: Transforming Curriculum and Teaching.” Griffin commented that the media,

gives off so much information that can be valid or invalid, positive or negative. Given the vulnerability of teenagers, the information goes both ways. The relationship that the media does create is so complicated. It is a constant battle back and forth, with all the information that’s given. We try to organize it and take it all in – it’s just so overwhelming (qtd. in Schwartz and Brown 1).

Schneider reports a split among his news literacy students – about one-third say they accept everything they encounter in the press, about one-third believe nothing or are highly cynical about news, and the other third are confused about their feelings regarding what journalistic sources to trust (Schneider, address).

A Newspaper Association of America Foundation study analyzing responses from nearly 100 people aged 13 to 18 across the country found that teenagers are “only somewhat interested in news...So a quick fix, such as those offered on search engines or generic portals such as AOL, suits them just fine. But if the news is too time consuming, difficult or unpleasant, it’s not worth the effort” (“Teens Know” 4). Understanding the news is not always easy for young people. The report states that,

It’s clear from listening to them that most news stories and sites assume users possess a certain background of orienting knowledge about issues, players and history – knowledge many teens don’t have. They don’t have a lifetime of background knowledge in their heads. To them, it sometimes feels just as hard and hopeless to understand the news as it would be to master calculus if they had missed the first half of the semester (“Teens Know” 5).

For some of the reasons mentioned above, teenagers spend few of their media viewing hours consuming news. A Kaiser Family Foundation report from early 2010 revealed that out of the 458 minutes the average young person spends with media each day, only 3 of those minutes are spent reading print newspapers – a drop from 6 minutes in 2004. Magazine reading dropped from 14 minutes a day in 2004 to 9 minutes a day in 2009 (Vahlberg 3). Indeed, teenagers are the least likely of any age group to read a daily

newspaper, watch the nightly news, or listen to radio news. The report showed that the 93 percent of teenagers surveyed go online, and more than one-third do so several times a day. The majority of young people get whatever little news they read from the Web: Only 1 in 5 teenagers interviewed reported reading articles online on a daily basis. The majority said when they get news they just “happen to come across it” (Patterson, “Young People” 22). The 2007 “Young People and News” study from the Shorenstein Center at Harvard University found that teenagers tend to find news in bits and pieces and do not necessarily have favorite sources of information.⁵ When a “top story” in the news breaks, teenagers were the least likely age group to claim exposure to the story. Young adults and teenagers were also the least likely to correctly identify the story’s factual element. For these major stories, teenagers were unlikely to turn to the newspaper or Internet, and the most likely of any age group to hear about it from another person.

These studies provide evidence that students lack the skills necessary to find news content that is thorough and comes from a trustworthy source, and that they do not appreciate the importance of doing so. Many teachers note that their students commonly lack these basic news literacy skills. Mark Otto, the assistant principal at The Facing History School in Manhattan, a News Literacy Project site, said, “I think most of our students, especially at the younger level, are not very good at figuring out what to believe, what not to believe and how to really analyze the source (“Check it Out”). Craig Leach, a television and media production instructor at Somerville High School in Massachusetts, observes that students are good at finding the information they want quickly. “But as far as taking it a step further to find out whether it is credible information and what went into creating it, they do not fare as well” (Leach). In a co-authored piece in *USA Today*, the News Literacy Project’s Miller and Brent

⁵ The web’s emphasis on hyperlinks and hypertext enables people to be news scavengers who instinctively transition between articles and information sources.

Cunningham, managing editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, write that news literacy is particularly important for the next generation of news consumers who spend more time accessing information but are not being given the tools to sort fact from fiction. “All information is not created equal, and it is crucial for the health of our democracy that people have the skills to find what is credible – and to understand why the distinctions matter” (Miller and Cunningham).

A common consequence of young Americans feeling overwhelmed by the barrage of news is disengagement, which news literacy education can help counter. Fabrice Florin is executive director of the News Trust, a nonprofit news service that provides news and opinion feeds from mainstream and independent sources. Out of concern that “a whole generation of people are reaching voting age, are very disengaged from the issues they are supposed to vote on and are missing out on the important news of the day,” Florin helped develop the teacher guide: “Can You Trust the News? How to Teach Students to Recognize Good Journalism.” This news literacy curriculum helps students spot misinformation and aims to “connect them with quality sources of news and information so they can get the news they need as citizens” (Florin). The News Literacy Project’s Miller expressed similar hopes about what students will learn from his group’s news literacy curriculum: “We want to give them the tools to decide for themselves where the most credible information is on whatever platform and from whatever medium. Certainly the values inherent in quality journalism are extremely important for the democracy and for the country’s future” (A. Miller).

The Shorenstein Center’s “Young People and News” report notes that there are disagreements on how to strengthen young people’s appetite for news. One camp believes that young people will simply become more interested in serious news as they age. Others argue that it is a matter of education – strengthening students’ sense of civic responsibility so that they will turn to news as a means of staying informed about public affairs (Patterson,

“Young People” 5). Evidence that exposure to news literacy courses can increase students’ sense of civic engagement (at least as it relates to one measure of engagement) comes from Stony Brook, which is keeping longitudinal data on students who have taken the news literacy class. The Center for News Literacy’s Miller said preliminary analyses show that students who took the class were not only more likely than students in a control group to be able to discern poorly sourced journalism, but they also were more likely to register to vote in 2008 than their peers. The statistically significant difference in voter registration numbers is greater than what would be explained by self-selection, the idea that more engaged students might on their own chose to enroll in the news literacy course. Beyond tracking this indicator of civic engagement, the Center for News Literacy is measuring whether students can critically evaluate information and take action on it, and whether their news consumption habits have changed⁶ (D. Miller).

If the goal of education is to train young people to be productive members of society, teaching them about the importance of accessing and critically analyzing information is paramount. Schneider argues that it is not enough to teach students why journalism is a crucial profession, explaining that,

We need to give them the real analytical tools so they can judge for themselves the reliability and credibility of the news reports they received. The ultimate check against irresponsible journalism...is having an audience that for themselves can begin to discern and recognize information they can trust and information that is suspect (Schneider, video).

Professor J. Lynn McBrien at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee College of Education argues, “Students in a democracy must learn how and why news stories are produced in order to think consciously and critically about information they learn from the

⁶ The Center for News Literacy surveys students and tests them on their literacy skills before taking the course and then one year after they have finished it. Results from a large sample of students are not yet available. Schneider said the key question is whether exposure to a news literacy curriculum affects students’ behaviors over time.

news media.” She writes that because contemporary society depends on the news media to inform citizens about local and international events, “we must be able to decode the (media) messages critically in order to interpret the messages” (qtd. in Schwartz 31). As McBrien explains, media educators tend to teach students to be skeptical of media messages, asking questions such as “What is left out of this message? Who is the creator of the message? What are the media maker’s values?” (qtd. in Schwartz 21) Indeed, news literacy instructors are charged with the task of teaching students to think about more than just whether a news report is factually accurate. They should be able to analyze how messages in the news media are constructed and whose interests are represented, as well as recognize whether the content comes from independent or corporately backed sources. Enabling news consumers to read between the lines and discern quality journalism in this manner encourages them to challenge news outlets on their sources and veracity, thus enforcing higher standards for journalism.

Evidence that courses integrating news literacy lessons help students develop their critical thinking capacities comes from a study of New Hampshire students who took part in a required, year-long eleventh-grade English/media communications course that incorporated extensive critical media analysis of print and audio texts. The students watched news media reports and analyzed the newscasts, wrote news stories and graphic displays, examined the layout of newspapers and Internet home pages, and compared coverage of an event across multiple media platforms. For one assignment, the students were asked to cut and paste newspapers to create a personal news sheet reflecting their own vision of what is and is not newsworthy – a lesson that helped them understand the role of journalists as gatekeepers. Other classes covered the idea of media ownership, and teachers asked students to create a list of advantages and disadvantages of an increasingly centralized media landscape. The students also kept a running tab throughout the course of what media they consumed and the companies that owned the content.

Renee Hobbs, founder of the Media Education Lab at Temple University and a co-founder of what then was the Alliance for a Media Literate America, along with co-author Richard Frost wrote in the journal *Research Quarterly* about this experimental media education class at Concord High School in New Hampshire in the late 1990s. Participating students were found to be further along than their peers who did not take the class in understanding media messages, developing critical thinking skills, and being able to recognize the purpose of media messages. The researchers came to this conclusion after evaluating students who took the course and those in a control group on their written responses to articles published in a newspaper, commentary that aired on public radio, and news segments that ran on television. The students were measured on their ability to analyze the message, purpose, and point of view of the pieces, as well as their ability to determine what information might have been omitted. Those who had taken the course fared considerably better in their ability to examine all of the issues (Hobbs, “Reading the Media” 101). Students not only learned to explore the news media, increased their ability to restate main ideas they encountered in informational texts, and learned the idea of audience in media messages, but they also “gained power as communicators, developing their skills of speaking, writing and media production...and they acquired a more focused appreciation of the concept of audience” (Hobbs, “Reading the Media” 149). These students also were found to be more interested in following politics through the news media after completing the course.

The challenge is to teach students to be discerning news consumers rather than cynics who inherently distrust the news media. Paul Mihailidis, assistant professor of media studies at Hofstra University, conducted a multi-year study of more than 200 undergraduates who took a media literacy course at the University of Maryland. He found that the course improved students’ ability to understand, evaluate, and analyze media messages. One might assume that these media-literate students would appreciate the media’s essential function in

American civic life. But Mihailidis writes that this was not the case – students in the survey displayed little active understanding or awareness of the media’s roles and responsibilities in a democratic society, or of its central role in informing citizens. “These findings suggest that media literacy education must focus on the connections between critical skills and the explicit understanding of media’s necessary role in civil society” (Mihailidis 1). The same can be said for news-literacy education, which should provide students with the tools necessary to critically analyze the news while also framing the news media as a crucial part of American society. Curricula that leave students without an appreciation of the media’s essential Democratic function or without the ability to evaluate media message are incomplete.

c. Secondary school students are particularly prone to undervalue access to reliable news

Despite some exposure at school to the First Amendment, young people tend to undervalue the importance of an independent and vigorous free press. A 2006 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation survey found that nearly three-fourths of high school students had taken a class that dealt with the First Amendment (up from 58 percent given the same survey in 2004), and more than 60 percent had taken classes that discuss the role of the media (an increase of 10 percentage points from two years earlier). However, 42 percent of teachers surveyed in 2006 agreed that schools are “doing a poor job of teaching students about the First Amendment,” compared to 36 percent in 2004 report (Yalof and Dautrich).

When questioned on attitudes toward the First Amendment in 2004, high school students in the Knight survey were found to be “less likely than adults to think that people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions.” Only half of students thought that newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of stories. In the 2006 follow-up study, the percentage of students who thought that the First Amendment

“went too far in the rights it guarantees” increased from 35 in 2004 to 45 two years later. Of the nearly 15,000 high school students who responded, 41 percent said the press in the United States has the right amount of freedom, while 30 percent say the press has too much freedom (Yalof and Dautrich).

Limitations on the rights afforded student news media by the Supreme Court may contribute to students’ restricted expectations of press freedom. Most notably, the high court in the 1988 case *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* ruled that administrators at Hazelwood East High School in suburban St. Louis were within their rights to censor articles from a student newspaper about teen pregnancy and the effects of divorce on children that were deemed contrary to the school’s educational mission. The court found that the administrators could exert more control on the content of the newspaper because it was produced for a school journalism class and thus was not a “form of public expression” (Hazelwood 4). Therefore, the school was not obligated to follow the precedent established in the 1969 Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*. The court ruled in *Tinker* that a public school’s suspension of students who had worn black armbands as a Vietnam War protest was unconstitutional. It held that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate,” and that school officials cannot censor student speech unless school officials reasonably forecast that the speech will cause a material and substantial disruption of school activities or collide with the rights of others (Tinker 5).

Since *Tinker*, however, the Supreme Court has sided with school officials rather than with free expression. In *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser*, the court ruled that administrators may prohibit student speech at a student assembly if it is vulgar, lewd, and plainly offensive, because “The undoubted freedom to advocate unpopular and controversial views in schools and classrooms must be balanced against the society’s countervailing

interest in teaching students the boundaries of socially appropriate behavior” (Bethel III). This decision preceded *Hazelwood*, a case that directly addressed student press freedom. Whereas the court viewed student free speech as essentially similar to that of adult free speech in *Tinker*, it clearly determined in subsequent cases that students’ speech rights were subservient to officials’ views concerning good grammar and appropriate behavior. Students may gain somewhat more freedom by expressing views in public forums not under school auspices, but the message remains that editorial control to serve an interest other than accuracy or truth is acceptable. Further, it is not clear that the endorsement of censorship would not be extended to the college press. In 2006, the Supreme Court decided not to consider *Hosty v. Carter*, thus allowing a 2005 ruling by the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to stand. In *Hosty*, the 7th Circuit held that *Hazelwood*, which dealt with high school newspapers, also applied to subsidized student publications at public colleges and universities. Had the court been eager to hold otherwise, it presumably would have accepted the case.

Viewed collectively, the resulting message to students is that a free press, a right derived from the individual right to free speech, is of only modest value, because it may be subordinated to authoritarian concerns. Indeed, according to the 2006 Knight Foundation study, only 64 percent of students favored the right of high school students to report in their own newspapers without school officials’ approval. A diminished appreciation of the value of an independent, vigorous, and high-quality news media is an obvious impediment to efforts to encourage students to demand and avidly consume such news.

d. Reaching the broadest group who can benefit from news literacy for the longest time

The goal of more widespread news literacy instruction is most effectively promoted by focusing efforts on reaching the greatest numbers of people who are old enough to learn it

yet young enough to use the knowledge for the greatest part of their adult lives. Targeting only college students for news literacy instruction may represent an opportunity lost. Even without exposure to a focused media education curriculum, the population attending college is likely better equipped to gauge the value of news content than those who never enter the academy. More importantly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2003, only 27 percent of adults had attained at least a bachelor's degree, while 85 percent of all adults 25 years or older had completed at least high school. Teaching news literacy in secondary schools can serve to counterbalance students' tendencies to undervalue the independence of the press and diminish the longer-term impact of a reduced demand for quality news by a significant portion of the population.

Another benefit of teaching news literacy to the broadest group of students is the ability to mitigate the inequities in access to digital content. The "Informing Communities" report persuasively argues that digital and media competencies are new forms of foundational learning:

The consequences of neglecting this challenge can be dire. Students who are deeply immersed in the world of online communication outside of school may find classrooms that marginalize new technologies both tedious and irrelevant. For students who lack online access at home, schooling that fails to provide digital and media skills threatens to leave them at a profound social, economic, and cultural disadvantage" (Knight Commission 4).

This argument that low-income students often are not exposed to the same amount of digital content in the home as their peers, and that schools can be a great equalizer in providing all students with time to explore news and other forms of online information is persuasive because it highlights the digital divide as it relates to students' news and information savvy.

V. HISTORY OF THE MEDIA/NEWS LITERACY MOVEMENTS

The media literacy movement in the United States far preceded the push specifically for news literacy instruction. The history of media literacy illustrates important lessons about where media education proponents have succeeded in making inroads and where they failed to persuade school officials about the importance of their field. News literacy is taught in select secondary school and college classrooms nationwide due to the efforts of these media-education advocates who often faced skeptics within the educational establishment. Masterman, the longtime media educator, writes,

The dominant view of the mass media adopted by most educationalists has been one of deep-rooted mistrust. It is a tradition with a long history...this view produced one or two responses from teachers. On the one hand, the media could be legitimately ignored as irrelevant, indeed antithetical to the proper processes and legitimate functions of schooling in inculcating and protecting cultural standards....On the other hand, the increasing popularity and persuasiveness of the media led to a call for schools to adopt a more active role of cultural resistance to the shallow emotional responses which they were believed to encourage. Herein lay the unpromising origins of media education, and of the attitudes which were to be characteristic of the first and longest phase in the subject's development, lasting from the early 1930s to the early 1960s (qtd. In Kubey, "Information Age" 20).

Skeptics of media-literacy education have long argued that teaching about the mass media meant endorsing "low" culture, which went against the function of schools. Considine, a media literacy proponent, argues that antagonism has historically existed between the educational aims of the American classroom and the entertainment aims of the mass media. "Most academics in colleges of education, and therefore most teachers, have had little training in mass media and have little understanding of how to connect it to the curriculum" (qtd. in Kubey, "Information Age" 250). For some of the reasons listed above, teachers have historically not seen journalistic writing as an appropriate classroom text. "When it comes to news literacy in the context of K-12 education, news and current events have been

dramatically declining as a component of the American educational curriculum for over 50 years” (Hobbs, “What Works and What Doesn’t 6).

Despite being the foremost mass media producer in the world, the United States historically has lagged behind other countries in the study of media’s effects on society. Patricia Aufderheide, a professor of film and media arts at American University, wrote in an early 1990s essay,

The United States has a culture fascinated with individualism and with the potential of technology to solve social problems. Its culture is also pervaded with commercialism such that...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 (qtd. in Kubey, “Information Age” 81).

Some 40 years before Aufderheide made that observation, at a time when media literacy was a foreign concept in education circles, the National Society for the Study of Education’s 1954 yearbook, “Mass Media and Education,” acknowledged the growing impact of movies and newspapers on American society, and thus on schooling (Schwartz 7). Concern about the effects of television on Americans – and particular American youth – grew in the 1950s as the TV became a fixture in the home. Marshall McLuhan, a prominent media philosopher, gave voice to the idea that the mass media of the times were turning the world into a “global village,” in which news had a wide reach and influence. The book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* illustrated that the media was a subject worthy of serious scholarship. McLuhan advocated the use of electronic media as a teaching tool in schools. He wrote an early curriculum titled “Understanding New Media” that “introduced his basic theme that media – speech, print, photography, telegraphy, telephone, film, radio, television – all function as extensions of the human organism to increase power and speed.” It was, as educator Kate Moody describes, “perhaps our first media literacy curriculum,

predating the work that would emerge in Great Britain and Australia in the late 1960s and 1970s” (2).

A contemporary of McLuhan’s, media scholar and educator John Culkin, is credited with introducing to a mass audience the ideas that young people should be taught to analyze the media and that it is the school’s responsibility to help create a media literate population. Culkin, described by Moody as the “man who invented media literacy,” in the late 1960s founded the New York-based Center for Understanding Media with the hopes of teaching teachers how to understand all forms of media, including print and television. It was the first center with such a stated purpose. As Moody writes, “[Culkin] believed that if teachers understood the function of media in culture, they could use that awareness to help young people become better learners” (4). The 1960s saw a range of experiments involving media education in high schools, and the Center for Understanding Media had a hand in several of these projects. In the early 1970s, the Found Foundation granted the center more than \$120,000 to carry out training in the use of new media in the Larchmont-Mamaroneck public schools in New York. Moody, a resident of Larchmont who witnessed and participated in the early experiments with TV production, wrote that “the project revealed that the study of media, accompanied by hands-on involvement, leads to creativity, critical thinking, heightened motivation toward schoolwork and a habit of experimentation and play that can lead to all sorts of discoveries” (5).

By the time a select few American schools began experimenting with media education, England, Australia, and Canada had already made media literacy an established part of the secondary school curriculum. By the late 1970s, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had declared that the mass media have an essential role to play in the education of young people. (Schwartz 7). Still, in the United States, there remained doubts about the appropriateness of applying aesthetic criteria, derived

from the arts, to the vast majority of the media output, including news. Thus, educators had relatively little to say about two extremely powerful cultural institutions – television and the press, Masterman writes (qtd. in Kubey, “Information Age” 23).

Amid skepticism from the general public, the United States government invested several million dollars near the end of the 1970s to pilot “critical viewing” curricula in preschool, elementary, middle and high schools, and colleges. The main objective of this program was to protect young people from what many believed to be the harmful effects of television – referred to as the “inoculation approach” that long defined media literacy in America. The support from the government was short-lived, and media literacy was, in the words of Oklahoma State University education professor Gretchen Schwarz, “one more passing educational fad. Perhaps this was because of the limited focus on television, and because classroom teachers and students weren’t involved in the design and planning of the project” (9).

Media education remained slow to gain footing in the United States throughout the 1980s. Thoman, a leader in the media literacy field, founded the Center for Media Literacy in 1989 as an educational organization providing professional development and educational resources, including teacher guides. By the 1990s, a new grassroots effort took hold, with parents and teachers taking the lead rather than government officials, though these efforts were endorsed by then-U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley and then-U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala. Many proponents of media literacy began de-emphasizing the inoculation approach and focused their efforts on helping students deconstruct media messages and find trusted content. In 1992, the first National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy was convened by the Aspen Institute, bringing together dozens of educators and activists to establish a definition, vision and framework for developing media literacy programs in the United States (NAMLE Media Literacy History).

Several national conferences on media literacy followed in subsequent years. Responding in part to the rise of computers and the Internet, The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1995 published “Great Transitions: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century,” which stated that “schools would do well to introduce instruction and activities that contribute to media literacy” (Schwarz 10).

Even with the increased acceptance in the 1990s of media education’s place in the secondary school curriculum, the United States continued to trail other countries. Robert Kubey, director of the Center for Media Studies at Rutgers University, wrote a seminal paper in 1998 on “why the United States lags behind other major English-speaking countries in the formal deliver of media education.” Kubey notes that since the mid-1990s, Australia has mandated media education from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Since 1987, the Canadian province of Ontario has mandated such a curriculum for students in grades seven through twelve. College-bound students in England have long been tested on media studies in entrance examinations (Kubey, “Obstacles” 2). Kubey argues that one reason why media education efforts in the United States have largely failed to take root is that unlike other English-speaking countries, the leading media literacy advocacy groups in the United States are “outside the educational establishment” (Kubey, “Obstacles” 2). He also makes the case that media educators tend to be more isolated in the United States. Although an effort to push national standards at the secondary school level is currently in progress, having 50 states with different educational authorities and hundreds of powerful, diverse local school boards makes it difficult to push through wide-reaching education reform or reach a consensus about national educational standards. “It is generally easier in more homogenous countries for parents to cede power to an educational author, because it is assumed that teachers and administrators share the same sort of background and values” (Kubey, “Obstacles” 3).

As a way to bring together the disparate groups of people who support media education, the Alliance for a Media Literate America was formed in 2001. The group has roughly 400 members, including high school teachers and administrators. The Action Coalition for Media Education was founded in 2002, and the two organizations continue to disagree about how to define the goals of media literacy. AMLA, now known as NAMLE, views media literacy mostly as an effort to ensure that “people have the skills needed to critically analyze and create messages using the wide variety of communication tools now available.” (NAMLE Vision and Mission) ACME supports teaching people to be critical media consumers but also emphasizes media reform and encourages people to take political action against the media (Schwarz 235).

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, media literacy education rose in visibility in K-12 schools, although the inclusion of such curricula in the classroom was far from widespread (Hobbs, “School-Based” 43). Hobbs wrote in 2005 that “many approaches to media literacy are emerging simultaneously in the 15,000 school districts in the United States” (qtd. in Schwartz 74). Proponents of school-based media education were bolstered by a 2003 report called “Learning for the 21st Century,” published by the national organization Partnership for 21st Century Skills and endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Education Association, and a range of technology companies. The report named media literacy as one of the core information and communication skills for the present century.

In 2008, newspaper editors initiated a small seminar at the Poynter Institute “to understand and promote news literacy” (“Rebooting the News”). The “Rebooting the News” conference later that year had a similar mission of advancing the news literacy field. In 2009 and 2010, the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University sponsored meetings of

prominent journalists, university presidents, journalism school deans, and other academics to examine strategies for teaching news literacy to undergraduate and high school students.

Despite these efforts by proponents of media and news literacy, Schwarz writes that champions of media education still are dealing with “all the problems of a young field – becoming visible in the academic world, acquiring credibility among educators and others, developing a strong research base, and finding funding” (255). Hobbs argues that there has been little scholarship over the past decade about “the broader cultural and educational value of using the news and current events in K-12 education.” (Hobbs, “What Works and What Doesn’t” 7).

Many teachers remain unfamiliar with the terms media literacy and news literacy and have not attempted to integrate media education into their curriculum. As proponents of critical media literacy Douglas Keller and Jeff Share write, “Despite the ubiquity of media culture in contemporary society and everyday life, and the recognition that the media themselves are a form of pedagogy, and despite criticisms of the distorted values, ideals, and representations of the world in popular culture, media education in K-12 schooling in the U.S. has never really been established and developed (4).

The slow pace of adoption of news literacy curricula in secondary schools is inconsistent with the goal of preparing students to be informed 21st-century citizens. As the News Literacy Project aptly explains,

Even as young people increasingly participate in the national discussion through such forms of communication as text messages and blogs, the concept of news literacy is not widely discussed in America’s public schools. With the 24-hour news cycle and the explosion of online information, today’s students have access to unprecedented amounts of information. Yet they are also confronted with the daunting task of determining the reliability of myriad sources of ‘news.’ And surveys show they are increasingly uninterested in information with a civic purpose (News Literacy Project).

According to The Center for Media Literacy's Jolls, "There's a lot of talk about teaching 21st-century skills but we aren't seeing that in practice. When you walk into classrooms students don't have the skill sets needed to sort out fact from opinion or deconstruct a news story." Others report that news literacy is taught only sporadically. "We just aren't hearing a hue and cry from people within education that we need to teach people to smartly consume the media that they are being bombarded with" (Kennedy).⁷

VI. BARRIERS TO NEWS LITERACY'S INCLUSION IN SCHOOL CURRICULA

Secondary education has its share of institutional barriers to changes such as the widespread inclusion of news literacy as a part of the curriculum. These barriers include competition for instructional time with other topics, teachers' lack of familiarity with or appreciation of the importance of news literacy, skepticism and indifference from school officials and parents, political sensitivities, and inadequate access to relevant media technology.

a. Competition for class time in the era of achievement standards

It can be difficult for school systems to find class time to devote to media education at a time when teachers already have so many core-content requirements mandated by state or school district policies. State-level education officials typically establish basic course requirements for graduation and target standards for student competencies (often called "learning objectives"). Local school boards often add their own requirements. News literacy must compete for instructional time with these requirements as a separate course, as part of a broader media literacy class, or as part of the content in another course, such as English, social studies, or journalism/communications. The key task is convincing decision makers of

⁷ Jack Kennedy is a retired teacher and president of the Journalism Education Association, a national scholastic journalistic organization for teachers and advisers.

news literacy's importance and relevance to existing requirements. Stephen Schultz, a curriculum development instructor at the Center for News Literacy who formerly taught social studies in New York, told teachers attending the Stony Brook conference that their greatest challenge would be convincing officials at their schools that news literacy instruction helps students meet state academic standards (Schultz).

Media educators also cite the federal "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB), the nearly decade-old education law emphasizing improvement on reading and math standardized test scores, as a major obstacle to getting elements of news literacy into the classroom. NCLB puts pressure on schools and teachers to demonstrate results in these areas, which can squeeze out time devoted to other competencies. Teachers' plates are already full, and "with No Child Left Behind, they often don't have the luxury of the time to teach [media and news literacy]" (Silverblatt). Share, who writes about teachers' experience with critical media literacy instruction, believes that teachers are worried both about the lack of time to develop curriculum and the challenge in demonstrating to administrators that their media education units help boost test scores (71). David Bruce, a University of Buffalo education professor whose research focuses on new literacies and teacher education, notes: "Skeptics may question the disconnect between teaching in the spirit of transformative inquiry while students and educators are evaluated by standardized tests" (941). And Kennedy of the Journalism Education Association comments that "we are in a world now where if it is not showing up on a test score, it is likely going to be pushed aside. If it cannot be measured, we are not going to teach it" (Kennedy).

Kennedy has noticed a decrease in social studies teachers teaching civics units that would include lessons about the importance of a vibrant free press. In their *USA Today* op-ed, Alan Miller and co-author Cunningham argue that "the focus on standardized testing has tended to drive out 'civics' or 'current events' courses" from the secondary school

curriculum (Miller and Cunningham). Dean Miller, the Center for News Literacy director, agrees that civics education has waned as secondary schools have devoted an increasing amount of resources on science and math. “The result has been that a lot of students to come to us [at Stony Brook] do not understand the fundamentals of the First Amendment. We really underplay that in our schools” (D. Miller).

Indeed, news literacy is not a topic that easily lends itself to measuring learning outcomes. Teachers wanting to incorporate news literacy into their classrooms need to convince district officials not only that their lessons will not detract from instructional time devoted to raising students’ scores in NCLB benchmark areas but that they can help in areas such as critical reading. According to Erica Scharrer, a communications professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, there is growing scholarly work in media education but surprisingly little discussion about outcomes and assessments. “How should we expect people who have participated in a media-literacy program to be different from people who have not? What outcomes can be anticipated?” she writes. Those promoting specific media education curricula need to determine whether critical thinking has improved, whether critical viewing has been encouraged, whether students are asking questions about the media, and what other outcomes are appropriate in determining the effects of participation in media literacy instruction (Scharrer 354). Scharrer argues that there are inherent problems with measuring the effectiveness of media education. For one, young people view so much media outside of class time or for school assignments that it is hard to isolate the effects of a single media course or unit. As she writes, “It may be a grave oversimplification to expect that participation in a potentially short and topically limited curriculum will make an immediate, profound difference in how we respond to the media we encounter every day” (Scharrer 355).

Diana Laufenberg, a teacher at Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia who has incorporated news literacy into her classroom, says there is a strong case to be made that

news literacy helps students excel on standardized tests. “Students in these courses are being asked to critically interact with challenging texts, which turns them into much more analytical readers. Having them interact with information at a high level, that will absolutely show up on their reading scores” (Laufenberg). Schultz told the summer institute teachers to promote news literacy as a way to increase students’ critical thinking skills that are measured on state tests.

In “Measuring Success,” a 2002 report written for the Newspaper Association of America Foundation by a University of Minnesota researcher, students involved in programs in which teachers used newspapers in the classroom were found to perform about 10 percent better on a standardized reading test than those who did not participate. The results were most pronounced at the middle-school level, and schools with large minority and low-income populations showed the most improvement on the tests (Meyer 2). Several other studies show that students who take part in these Newspaper-in-Education programs develop more positive attitudes and interests towards the media and reading, tend to be newspaper readers at home, have a better knowledge of current events, and vote when they become eligible (“High Five”).

However, at least one study provides insufficient evidence of a positive correlation between news literacy instruction and standardized test scores. Sixth-grade students in four states, many of whom were from low-income families, received their hometown newspaper to go along with lesson plans developed for the Newspaper Association of America. The association provided teachers with training in how to use the lessons in their classroom. The goal of the “High Five” program was to improve participants’ reading scores (vocabulary and reading comprehension). Students were given a pre and post test to measure the effect of exposure to the curriculum. According to a 2006 University of San Diego report on the test results, the High Five project “was only modestly successful in raising the

vocabulary scores of participating sixth grade students.” Students in the treatment group showed gains in vocabulary of about six percent, although those in New Jersey scored 17 points higher on the vocabulary test than non-participating students. But the report notes that “when it comes to gains in reading comprehension the evidence is quite clear that the intervention did not produce any meaningful change” (DeRoche and Galloway 12). The report notes that not all areas of literacy were tested, including spelling, fluency, and writing, and that many students take months or years to fully realize the gains associated with participation in the initiative, while the gains examined in the tests were immediate. Students were tested after participating for only one day a week over a 12- to 14-week span, leading curriculum co-creator Sherrye Dee Garrett⁸ to note that the results might have been more pronounced had the program run for the entire year, as intended (Garrett). It is also worth noting that newspapers are different from the texts that students most often encounter in the classroom, and that standardized tests often are often limited in the range of literacies they measure.

Studies that clearly connect news literacy instruction with improved student reading scores would certainly go a long way toward news literacy’s acceptance as a worthwhile element of the secondary school curriculum. However, even if educators become sold on its merits, integrating news literacy into the curriculum remains a significant time investment. Teachers can use the lesson plans developed at universities or nonprofits, but integrating the content into their existing course and tailoring the instruction to a particular age group can be a lengthy task. “Teachers wonder how just one more thing is to be added to an already burgeoning curriculum” (Kubey, “Obstacles” 5).

⁸ Garrett is an associate professor of education at Texas A&M Corpus Christi and a prolific creator of news literacy guides.

b. Lack of teacher familiarity with news literacy curricula

Another concern raised about including news literacy lessons in secondary school curricula is that teachers are not equipped to lead discussions on topics such as press freedom, media consolidation, and audience bias. Lack of familiarity with the topic can lead to wasted instructional time. If intimidated by the unfamiliar, teachers may deem it easier to teach what they know and avoid bringing new elements into their curricula. News-literacy instruction requires teachers to not only closely follow the news but to take on the added challenge of relating it to what is being covered in their class. Teachers must adapt quickly to current events, preventing overreliance on the same course materials year after year. Without pre-service training on how to integrate news into the classroom, teachers are left to fend for themselves. Laufenberg understands why the deictic nature of news literacy makes some teachers nervous. “There is tons of news out there, and you need to interact with it at an analytical level as it happens. You cannot plan ahead for current events, and it makes some teachers uncomfortable to plan lessons around things that have not yet happened. They want to control the content” (Laufenberg).

In the spring of 2004, Webster University surveyed Missouri’s public and private high schools to determine the extent to which media literacy was being taught (it did not ask specifically about news literacy). Of the 33 out of a possible 618 schools that responded, 21 reported covering some element of media literacy in the curricula. The most common answer as to why the entire school has not yet integrated media literacy into their curricula: “Teachers are not equipped to teach media literacy.” The response “teachers are intimidated to teach media literacy” was also given often. Eighty-five percent of respondents said there needs to be more professional development opportunities for teachers who want to teach media literacy (Douglass 5). Garrett believes the lack of professional development for media education in the United States hurts teachers who want to effectively teach about the news

media. Without training on how to use newspapers in the classroom, for example, teachers do not realize the range of possibilities beyond giving current events quizzes (Garrett). Silverblatt agrees with the results showing that teachers are largely unprepared to teach the subject, because “Someone has to teach the teachers” (Silverblatt). Hobbs writes,

Based on my experience as a teacher-educator, I have observed that it takes about three years of practice, supported by staff development and peer critique, to enable teachers to develop the new skills and knowledge they need to effectively use media texts in the classroom to promote critical-thinking and analysis skills (Hobbs, “School-Based” 53).

Education schools that prepare many of today’s secondary school teachers do not regularly offer instruction on how to incorporate news literacy instruction into the classroom or test teachers on this content area. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the voluntary national association of educator preparation programs, has not surveyed their members to determine if their course work covers media/news literacy. The association does not believe this information has systematically been collected by anyone (Petroff). According to Hobbs, few schools of education explore media literacy in a systematic way, and pre-service teachers rarely get more than a single class period to explore the concept. “Young people with interests in education who majored in English literature, communication studies, or film students may fare better than those who attend education schools in this regard,” she writes (Hobbs, “Reading the Media” 130). Jolls, the Center for Media Literacy president, finds the lack of teacher training in media education at the university level alarming. “The requirements for pre-service teachers do not reflect 21st-century skills. Teachers are unprepared to teach media literacy. It’s not embedded in the educational system” (Jolls). In its “Informing Communities” report, The Knight Commission endorses a federal initiative to assess the quality of digital and media literacy programs in the nation’s schools, including a close look at efforts by institutions of higher education to prepare future teachers to teach about the media (Knight Commission 4).

Silverblatt supports more teachers colleges offering media education courses and training, but he believes it is not just the job of education schools to offer this content. Roughly a decade ago, he and a colleague reviewed the state of media literacy instruction throughout all of higher education and found barely more than 60 colleges with degree programs or individual courses in media literacy. Five years later, that number had tripled. Yet media education instruction at colleges is far from widespread (Silverblatt). In some cases, the training is offered but teacher interest is lacking. Candace Perkins Bowen, director of the Center for Scholastic Journalism at Kent State University, teaches a methods class in the education school for teachers who want to teach about the media. Many students in her classes are journalism teachers with little relevant experience in the field who are more concerned with issues like how to operate web design programs than how to teach students to critically analyze media messages or evaluate sources. When it comes to teaching news and media literacy, “some teachers say they don’t know where to begin” (Bowen).

Some teachers who have incorporated news literacy into their classroom do not perceive the need for an extensive journalism or media studies background to be effective. Lynn Washington, a convergence media director at Richland Northeast High School in South Carolina, teaches news literacy in her classes on broadcast journalism, photography, and web production. Washington said she has no background in journalism but is an avid news consumer. “I do not think it is that hard to teach media literacy. When people say, ‘I do not have a background in this field,’ I respond that I do not see it as being so complex that you cannot do some introductory unit on how the news is reported” (Washington).

News-literacy curricula and individual lesson plans are widely available for teachers who know how to access them. This is less the case for news literacy because it is a relatively young field. Considine, the Appalachian State media studies professor, writes that for a long period of time the only materials available even in limited ways in the United States were

written or produced in another country. As a result, “While the theoretical foundations of media literacy were addressed and relevant, the examples cited were Australian or British, and were not easily related to American media.” Increasingly, there are materials produced by and specifically designed for American educators (Kubey, “Information Age” 248).

Still, individual teachers who want to adopt news-literacy curricula often have no one at their school or in their district to turn to for advice on where to look for these resources. Schneider told the teachers assembled for the summer institute at Stony Brook that “You are the early adopters of news literacy, and you are not going to have a lot of people at your school who understand it or teach it” (Schneider). Leslie Tran, a teacher at Abington Friends School in Philadelphia, was energized after attending the “Rebooting the News” conference at Temple in 2008, but has been unable to find a way to integrate news literacy into her fourth-grade reading, writing, social studies, and math classes. Tran said there are no teachers at her private school with whom she can collaborate on media education lesson plans. Colleagues lacked time to think creatively about the topic, instead choosing to focus on the traditional secondary school curriculum. “I feel isolated. If more people were thinking about [news literacy], it would be helpful to me” (Tran). While teachers in other countries have ample opportunity to collaborate at media centers and conferences, teachers in the United States often arrange and pay for their own media training through private workshops. As Kubey explains, “Many eager would-be media literacy teachers in the U.S. are young, untenured, and lack the power to make significant changes” (Kubey, “Obstacles” 4).

c. Overcoming skepticism and indifference

A lack of support from school officials, parents, and other community members is an impediment to integrating news literacy lessons into the classroom. Hobbs writes, “Although the use of popular-culture materials...[is] becoming more and more common in American schools, there is little widespread public enthusiasm for the use of popular mass media texts

among most education and business leaders, and even less among parents and community leaders” (Hobbs, “School-Based” 51). Aaron Manfull addresses the value of sources and information obtained from the Internet in his journalism and visual media class at Francis Howell North High School in St. Louis. Manfull has had to battle school and district administrators who do not believe his class fits with the mission of English. Manfull says,

Sometimes [administrators] get tunnel vision so that if the course isn’t called English one, two, or three, and if you are not teaching classic literature, they think students somehow are not getting what they need for [standardized] tests. But many tests deal with nonfiction reading and essay writing, and my courses help students prepare for those tasks (Manfull).

According to Alan Miller, the News Literacy Project director, the best way to win support for news literacy instruction is to sell principals or other administrators directly on its merits. Getting buy-in from the higher-ups at a school also helps put teachers who champion news literacy at ease. Silverblatt, the Webster media literacy professor, said that while administrators do not always listen to teachers about what to include in the curriculum, they do tend to listen to parents. He encourages teachers who want to integrate elements of media literacy into the classroom to explain to parents the importance of the subject. Masterman, the British media educator, writes,

Parental understanding and support is vital...it’s important for media teachers to open up lines of communication with parents as early as possible, preferable even before any teaching has begun, in order to explain precisely what they hope to achieve, to describe the kinds of activity that students will engage in, and to explore the active role that parents themselves might play in the media education of their children (qtd. In Kubey, “Information Age” 55).

Believing media education to be a form of curriculum development that will not only be new to most parents but will be especially open to misinterpretation, Masterman adds,

The media teacher who can generate parental understanding and support, who can take parents into her confidence about her curriculum objectives, and who can work cooperatively with parents and parenting groups, will find that she has important allies in her task of developing a critical understanding of the media amongst her pupils (261).

Efforts to convince educators and parents of the value of news-literacy instruction can be hampered when curricula include suggested classroom activities with little apparent academic value,⁹ or that appear designed mostly to promote a particular publication. Masterman cautions educators about integrating newspapers into the school curriculum without asking students to think critically about the content:

They are concerned to stress the liveliness, attractiveness and relevance of newspapers with the study of student subjects, as an adjunct to textbooks, and there is much to be said for these arguments. What is left out of the account is the reliability and quality of the information which newspapers supply. If there are good reasons for expanding the use of newspapers throughout the school curriculum, then there are even better ones for ensuring that this development is accompanied by a commensurate expansion in media literacy schemes across the curriculum. Newspaper-in-Education programs too readily promote the idea that the very use of media in the classroom itself constitutes a form of media education (265).

News literacy proponents face the challenge of convincing those who are indifferent to or unfamiliar with this form of media education that it is worth including in the secondary school curriculum. An even greater challenge is to win over skeptics, some of whom are concerned that the publications providing content and offering staff journalists as guest lecturers are simply trying to promote their products and cultivate future readers through educational programming.

d. Political sensitivities in teaching news literacy

School boards, administrators, parents, and others are often concerned about integrating media education into the classroom out of a fear that the instruction is inherently political and serves as a platform for teachers to favor or rail against the liberal or conservative press or to endorse ideological values. Rutgers' Kubey writes that "some teachers fear that engaging in media education could tag them as being political." He said it

⁹An example from the High Five curriculum: One assignment asks students to hunt through the newspaper to find the weather, the name of a politician and a comic strip. There's also a lesson on why it's important for journalists to know newspaper jargon.

is telling that efforts to teach using the mass media have advanced further in private and parochial schools than in public schools because,

private schools do not need to look over their shoulder at local and governmental authorities if they use media education as a way to teach values, or engage in educational innovation or experimentation. The public school teacher often needs to be much more vigilant (Kubey, “Obstacles” 5).

Hobbs agrees that “some educational leaders worry about the potential of media literacy to be used as a tool for propagandizing by the teacher” (Hobbs, “School-Based” 53). Oklahoma State’s Schwarz notes that “many parents object to having teachers examine such value-laden subjects, and many teachers believe they are already overburdened by expectations” (11).

Julie Rowse, who teaches English and wrote the curriculum for a class called contemporary media issues teacher at Bellevue West High School in Nebraska, is cognizant of some parents’ concerns that her news literacy lessons come with political judgments. In both classes, she raises the issue of media ownership as a way to open students’ eyes about the small number of major companies that own many of the most popular news media outlets. She discusses the intersection between politics and the news, and uses as an example the programming that’s under the *Fox* umbrella. Rowse says,

I tell them that the news outlet is to the [political] right, but that not all the shows on *Fox* are necessarily that way. I do not begrudge any student [for watching the channel]. I just want them to be aware of who is controlling the messages here and encourage them to get news from a variety of sources (Rowse).

Rowse is well aware that her school is diverse when it comes to the political leanings of students and parents, and she worries about getting angry phone calls from parents in response to her media education curriculum. She tries to avoid this by presenting a balance in class. “If I bring up an article from the *Huffington Post*, I try to bring up something from the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Drudge Report*. That’s what has kept me out of trouble so far” (Rowse). The News Literacy Project’s Miller cautions that news literacy is not about steering students to a particular media outlet. Sensitive about favoring certain publications and

television stations, Miller keeps a roster of journalists on call whose publications represent the ideological spectrum. He has not heard complaints about favoritism from students, parents, or administrators who are involved in his programs.

Teachers vary in their view of whether their media education lessons will be seen as controversial. Hobbs and Frost describe some teachers at Concord High School, where the study on the English/communications arts course for eleventh graders took place, as being delighted to have the chance to explore issues in American culture through the popular press, while others had “real reservations” about this type of critical pedagogy. Hobbs and Frost note that the teachers’ “own complex political beliefs and ideologies that inevitably entered into their teaching – in the selection of texts, in the topic and issues they emphasized, and in the instructional methodologies they employed (Hobbs, “Reading the Media” 154).

While maintaining absolute political objectivity is impossible for teachers introducing any classroom lesson, proponents of news literacy emphasize that the instruction is about teaching skills rather than ideological values. The core principles of media education published by what was then the American Media Literacy Association state that media literacy “is not a political movement,” but rather an educational discipline or approach that focuses on increasing students’ knowledge and skills. It is not partisan, and it is not about media bashing or changing the media. It is also not about inoculating people against presumed or actual harmful media effects (“Core Principals” 5). Silverblatt said it is inevitable that parents or administrators will raise questions about how media literacy or news literacy lessons deal with political question. But he said that “the argument, as far as I am concerned, is that media literacy is apolitical. What we are teaching is process, not product. We are not teaching what to think; we’re teaching how to think” (Silverblatt). Masterman agrees:

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....it does not seek to impose ideas on what constitutes 'good' or 'bad' TV, newspapers or films (qtd. In Kubey, "Information Age" 41).

Logan Aimone, director of the National Scholastic Press Association, a group that provides journalism education services to students, teachers, and media advisers throughout the country, said teachers in any subject can insert their politics into a classroom. But he does not think this a particularly prevalent among media educators (Aimone).

e. Inadequate classroom access to relevant media technology

Teachers often lack adequate access to the technology necessary to teach news literacy in the classroom. According to a 2007 study from the Carnegie-Knight Task Force on the Future of Journalism Education, news literacy curricula then in use tended to focus more on Web-based news than on television news or content in print newspapers. However, one-third of teachers surveyed in the report, "The Internet and the Threat It Poses to Local Media: Lessons from News in the Schools," said that they are not making as much use of Internet-based news as they would like because their classrooms are not equipped for it (Patterson, "The Internet" 5). Schools in some communities lack computers, wireless access, or the projection technology that is necessary for teachers to effectively use digital news as an educational resource. Buckingham acknowledges that even in resource-rich schools, media production labs can present acute classroom-management challenges. Teachers must develop ways to respond to inevitable technological obstacles and to ration students' access to equipment. They need to commit to long hours in the classroom paying close attention to students' work. And they must appreciate the fact that students have varying levels of experience in media production and analysis.

Hobbs argues that teachers not only need to know how to access the media content but how to use it appropriately. Because teachers for the most part are not trained in media education, there is widespread skepticism about media use in the classroom – a prime concern is that the teachers play videos primarily as a way to fill time (Hobbs and Frost 333). Hobbs writes that media production labs were not a central part of the first-year English/communication arts course at Concord High School, in part because teachers did not have much experience using these media tools or managing this type of classroom activity. Addressing these concerns could prove to be a vast organizational challenge (Hobbs, “School-Based” 3338).

VII. FINDING A PLACE IN EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

An important task for advocates of news-literacy education in secondary schools is getting the curriculum represented in educational standards, which reflect the policy consensus regarding what teachers are expected to cover and what students are expected to learn. Key to success in this regard is fostering recognition that news literacy involves critical thinking skills, a commonly listed learning objective, and that acquiring the ability to critically analyze news and public affairs information promotes good citizenship.

a. Recognition by education organizations of news literacy’s importance

There are no national standards in the United States specifying what students should know regarding news literacy. Still, organizations within the educational establishment have increasingly begun to recognize the importance of students being able to analyze information coming from the mass media. NCTE, which has long resolved to “explore more vigorously the relationship of the learning and teaching of media literacy to other concerns of English instruction,” for the first time in the late 1990s included media literacy goals in their

standards. The International Reading Association did the same. NCTE later released a position statement affirming that media literacy courses meeting the same academic standards of high school English courses should be counted as English credit for admission to college (NCTE).

The National Center for History in the Schools, an organization funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Humanities, aims to aid the professional development of K-12 history teachers. The group's latest version of "National Standards for U.S. History, Grades 5-12" says that students, before graduating high school, should be able to "explain the influence of media on contemporary culture" (National Center for History in the Schools). Likewise, the nonprofit group Center for Civic Engagement writes in its most recently updated "National Standards for Civics and Government, Grades 9-12," developed with support from the U.S. Education Department and the Pew Charitable Trusts, that "students should be able to evaluate, take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life" (Center for Civic Engagement III). The center notes that to achieve these standards, students should be able to, among other things,

explain the meaning and importance of freedom of the press; evaluate the role in American politics of television, radio, the press, data bases, and emerging means of communication; compare and contrast various forms of political persuasion and discuss the extent to which traditional forms have been replaced by electronic media; and explain how Congress, the president, state and local public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry (Center for Civic Engagement III).

In 2001, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, a private nonprofit corporation that conducts education research and consults with educators across the country, expanded its language arts standards to include "viewing" and "media." The standards require high school students to understand how editing shapes meaning in visual media, how news programs present the events of the day as stories with setting, character, conflict and

resolution, and how advertising in the media influences audiences (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning).

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers collaborated with state departments of education, curriculum content experts, administrators, teachers, and others to establish The Common Core State Standards Initiative, an effort to provide a clear understanding of the basic competencies that all American students should master during each year of their K-12 education. The Common Core State Standards make multiple references to media education but do not expressly mention media literacy or news literacy. For example, a section on “media and technology” is included under “Key Points in English Language Arts,” along with others such as “writing,” “reading” and “language.” The standards note, “Just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the twenty-first century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards” (“Key Points in English Language Arts”). Students in grades six through twelve are expected to be able to “integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.” They should be able to “analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account,” and are asked to “evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present and particular topic or idea.” The standards also call upon students to “integrate information presented in different media or formats as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue,” and to “make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhancing understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest” (“Key Points in English Language Arts”).

According to Bowen, the Center for Scholastic Journalism director, the standards include multiple mentions of media education because of eleventh-hour politicking from people who felt strongly that the original draft did not include enough about the importance of students analyzing media texts. Despite references made to media education, some advocates say the standards fall short because they make little reference to the importance of students listening and watching media – key components of news literacy (Brown).¹⁰ Much the same complaint has been made about most state standards – that they largely emphasize print literacy as opposed to multimedia literacy (Jolls).

Those behind the initiative have asked states to adopt and implement these national standards, unveiled in June 2010, noting that they are not intended to be a national curriculum for schools but rather a shared set of goals and expectations that local teachers, principals, and superintendents can incorporate into existing standards for secondary school students. As of July 2010, nearly thirty states had already adopted the standards (Lewin). How these states and future adopters integrate elements of the new core standards into existing ones remains to be seen. For now, there is a largely state-by-state establishment of educational standards on which many proponents of news literacy instruction must focus. Because state standards “really drive instruction,” people working to advance the profile of news literacy should make sure they are at the table when these standards are up for revision (Jolls).

Closely examining what is in each state’s educational standards is a fruitful exercise for educators who want to promote news literacy. According to The News Literacy Project’s Miller,

They are filled with things like how to think critically and analytically, how to use primary sources and how to tell fact from fiction, and how to write clearly. So we are

¹⁰ Jessica Brown runs the media literacy advocacy group Gateway Media Literacy Partners in St. Louis.

asking teachers [who take part in the program] to tell us what standards they felt we've helped them meet (A. Miller).

The News Literacy Project examined Maryland's standards and asked teachers involved in the project to identify specific parts of the social studies and English standards that the news literacy units could help them check off their list. "If you can show teachers that you are helping them do what they have to do anyway, and you're bringing in expertise and enrichment, that's a win for everyone" (A. Miller).

b. Some states have addressed standards for media and news literacy

Frank Baker, a media literacy educator and past president of the Alliance for a Media Literate America, has spent more than a decade tracking state curriculum standards. He found that every state's standards contain one or more passages calling for media education, though they typically do not use the phrase "media literacy."¹¹ In the last decade, state standards began to consistently refer to topics that fall under the rubric of media literacy. The standards often share words in common, such as mentioning that students should be able to identify "bias" and "propaganda," or analyze the influence of the media on issues like health care and politics. Writes Baker's colleague Kubey, who was involved in the original research on state educational standards:

These dramatic changes are the result of increasing numbers of state departments of education, school boards, principals, and researchers recognizing that they can no longer ignore the incredible importance of media in our everyday lives. Moreover, curriculum standards have changed by virtue of directly involving teachers in the writing of these new standards (Kubey, "Dawn of the 21st Century" 75).

Baker's research showed that calls for media education were most commonly found in the English, language, and communication arts standards, followed in frequency by social studies, history, and civics; and then health and nutrition. Only a handful of states have a

¹¹ None of the state standards mention "news literacy," a term that is unlikely to be used in the near future. (Baker, Personal Communication)

distinct “media” strand in their standards (Kubey and Baker 2). Cyndy Scheibe, an associate professor at Ithaca College who teaches media literacy, believes it is a mistake for states to mention media education in only one strand of their standards, such as English language arts. “Reading is not just something you do in English or social studies. So why limit [media education] to something that is only covered in one curricular area?” (Scheibe)

Some states make fleeting references to media education, while others dedicate considerable space to outlining the ways in which students should be able to analyze media messages. Following are examples of states considered to have some of the most thorough treatment of media education in their standards:

TEXAS, in 1998, included the term media literacy within its English language arts standards as “viewing and representing skills.” As such, students are expected to be able to analyze, interpret, and produce media. The state included media literacy in its standards because “there was a realization that we live in a media-dominated world, and that it is critical that every citizen be able to deconstruct and interpret media messages” (Crippen).¹² New standards went into effect during the 2009-2010 academic year. What was “viewing and representing” now is called “reading/media literacy,” with an increased emphasis on interpreting the implicit and explicit messages in various forms of media. A new, specific news literacy component requires students to know about media ownership, and how to detect bias and untrustworthy sources of news. There are several courses in the state’s high schools that target media literacy, among them electives in English departments that cover visual media analysis and production, as well as a course on contemporary media (Crippen).

CALIFORNIA’s history/social studies content standards are among the most thorough in the nation with regard to describing media education expectations (Kubey,

¹² Sarah Crippen is director of English Language Arts and Reading in the Division of Curriculum at the Texas Education Association.

“Dawn of the 21st Century” 175). The standards ask students to “evaluate, take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life, in terms of: (1) the meaning and importance of a free and responsible press, (2) the role of electronic, broadcast, print media, and the Internet as means of communication in American politics, and (3) how public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry and to shape public opinion” (California Department of Education 55). High school seniors are asked to consider the role of lobbying and the media in comparing the processes of lawmaking at each of the three levels of government. The state’s English language arts content standards state that by grade twelve, students should read regularly on their own, including literature, magazines, newspapers, and online information. According to Tom Adams, director of the California Department of Education’s Standards, Curriculum Frameworks, and Instructional Resources Division, it is important for students to understand the role of the press in helping to shape elections and historical events such as the civil rights movement. It is also vital that they understand the role of the news media as publications shift largely from print to electronic (Adams).

NORTH CAROLINA’s standards highlight the importance of visual literacy skills, including the ability to interpret ideas in non-print media. As part of its “Information Skills” standards, North Carolina expects students to be able to “question the messages presented in the mass media,” “recognize the power of media to influence,” and “produce media in various formats” (Public Schools of North Carolina).

WISCONSIN includes media literacy as part of its “Standards for Information and Technology Literacy,” and asks students to select and use media to access, organize, create, and communicate information for solving problems and constructing new knowledge, products, and systems (Wisconsin Department of Public Information). Both Wisconsin and

North Carolina place school libraries at the center of the effort to teach these new literacy skills.

OHIO frames media literacy as a component of “library guidelines,” stating that “effective school library media programs support the learning of media literacy skills in collaboration with classroom teachers, technology, integration specialists and technology coordinators.” The library guidelines spell out the media education expectations at each grade level, including: “Identify various media communications and messages in print and nonprint formats” (second grade); “Differentiate between fact and opinion and relevant and irrelevant information found in media communications” (fourth grade); “Recognize examples of opinion, bias and stereotyping found in print and non-print media communications” (sixth grade); “Assess the accuracy, relevancy and credibility of information presented in media communications” (eighth grade); “Assess procedures and decision-making processes involved in the construction of various media communications and messages” (tenth grade); and “Analyze the influences of media communications on society as a whole and in the shaping of governmental, social and cultural norms” (Ohio Department of Education).

MARYLAND’s Department of Education collaborated with the Discovery Channel on *Assignment: Media Literacy*, a curriculum created by Renee Hobbs and developed in line with state learning standards. Targeted at specific grades from K-12, the curriculum connects media literacy to language arts, social studies, health, math, and the arts. In elementary school, for example, students must “learn how to apply basic concepts including target audience, purpose, and attention-getting techniques used to create media messages in newspapers,” and “learn about the purpose of journalism and discover how journalists decide what gets on TV news or in a newspaper.” Middle school students are asked to reflect on their media consumption habits. The curriculum for high school asks students to “explore strategies that can be used to evaluate the authenticity and authority of media messages found

on TV, newspapers, the Internet, and in the library,” “examine how the news media’s coverage of crime affects our perceptions of reality and our beliefs about the criminal justice system,” and “reflect on the connections between journalism, history and literature by exploring colonialism in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Maryland Department of Education).

c. Inadequate resources impede efforts to deliver news literacy instruction

Resource limitations contribute to the challenge of getting adequate language regarding news and media literacy included in state standards. After much discussion between Gateway Media Literacy and Missouri’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the state agency decided to put “media literacy” in the title of its updated standards that govern media libraries. But in spring 2010, the department decided to take the term out of the title after recognizing that it “did not yet have the capability of doing media literacy as it should be done” (Brown). The New Mexico Media Literacy Project partnered with a state lawmaker in 2009 to introduce a bill mandating that media literacy be offered as an elective for public school students in grades six through twelve. The bill eventually passed with diluted language, giving schools the option to offer the course as an elective. This came in the wake of a state fiscal impact report showed that requiring media literacy courses would necessitate an “expensive and time consuming” revision of education standards (McAuley). Some legislators were concerned about passing an unfunded mandate, which could result in the state being unable to provide teachers with the training and curricular materials they need to properly teach media literacy. The bill, despite being weakened, put media literacy on the radar of policymakers (McAuley).¹³

As the Missouri and New Mexico examples show, state policymakers are worried about finding the resources to support the teachers asked to teach elements of news and

¹³ Christie McAuley is community education coordinator at The New Mexico Media Literacy Project.

media literacy. Even if media education is codified in state standards or laws, absent the will of education officials to insist standards are put into practice and state resources devoted to doing so effectively, there is no assurance that relevant material will be covered in the classroom. “No one should assume that these frameworks and goals in media education are being adequately met in any state. They are not. Educational guidelines and mandates do not always mean implementation, quality, or systematic evaluation” (Kubey, “Dawn of the 21st Century” 75). In the best-case scenarios, states play an active role in ensuring that teachers get the materials needed to integrate news and media literacy lessons into the classroom. Several years ago, the Texas Education Association worked with Temple’s Hobbs to develop media literacy curricula for teachers. The materials included videos, news media clips and discussion questions and were developed to be aligned with the “viewing and representing” standards that were put into place in 1998. The copyright lapsed for those materials, and the state no longer uses them. Texas has nothing similar available to teachers -- although it is in the process of developing electronic teacher guides relating to media literacy (Crippen). Still, “In large part because the state of Texas has validated media literacy, there has been a rapid increase in the number of resources and curriculum materials available to K-12 educators” (Hobbs, “School-Based” 47).

d. The need to cover news and media literacy on state assessments

Even if elements of news and media literacy are included in state standards, unless relevant content areas are covered on state assessments it may be unrealistic to expect teachers to give the subject adequate attention. For example, while Colorado’s educational standards make multiple references to media education, “there is no actual assessment attached. Whenever the standards are updated there is a mention of developing students who are good consumers of information. But it is always mentioned in a cursory way and left up to individual teachers [to champion]” (Kennedy). In a 2006 survey conducted by the State

Educational Technology Directors Association, 38 states responded to queries regarding their approach to media literacy. While many states pointed to their educational standards that mentioned media education, the group said only a handful reported a statewide assessment of media literacy skills (State Educational Technology Directors Association).

Texas has long tested students on their ability to analyze media messages. The “Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills” test, which every student must pass before graduation, has asked students to specifically demonstrate their news literacy. One question directs students to a photograph of Sen. Robert Kennedy and Cesar Chavez that ran in a local Texas newspaper. It contains a caption explaining that the two men are breaking bread as Chavez celebrates the end of a hunger strike. Students are asked the following: “*The Delano Courier-Times* is a) a union, b) a newspaper, c) a political slogan.” They are then asked, “The photographer chooses to capture both men looking away from the camera in order to a) represent a moment in which both men are unaware of the camera; b) show that the men don’t want to be photographed or c) indicate that the men’s physical appearance doesn’t matter.” Another year’s test asks students to look at the cover of a youth publication and determine the likely tone of the article published inside based on the cover photo and editorial content (Texas Education Agency). California’s public high schools cover topics such as how the modern media shape American politics. Students’ media analysis skills are tested in the state’s history/social science assessment tests given to eighth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade students. One released question tests students on their knowledge of historical functions journalists have served, such as muckraking during the Progressive Era (“2003-2008 Released Test Questions”). The decision to test students on news literacy knowledge is a sign that states like Texas and California are committed to doing more than just pledging their support to media education.

VIII. A BOTTOM-UP MOVEMENT

To a large extent, individual teachers, former journalists, current media educators, and other community members are spearheading efforts to include news literacy in school curricula. As Hobbs writes,

Media literacy in the United States is not emerging primarily from statewide or school district initiatives, but from the bottom-up energy of individual teachers who value the way that using media, technology, and popular culture improves the quality of their interaction with students or who are passionate about helping young people understand, challenge, and transform media's cultural dominance (qtd. In Schwartz 92).

A 2004 Webster University survey of the extent of Missouri's public and private high schools' use of media literacy instruction found that the twenty-one schools covering the topic in their curricula "appear to be implementing programs on their own" rather than waiting for a broader media education movement to grow (Douglass 2). The News Literacy Center's Miller agrees that "with a movement like news literacy, you want to bubble it up from the bottom with a strategy that involves getting individual teachers on board first and then taking the idea to school leaders who are troubled by the lack of students' civic engagement." Bottom-up media education movements have also proven effective in other countries. Considine, the Appalachian State instructional technology and media studies professor, notes that widespread media literacy inclusion in schools in countries like Australia and Canada is largely due to "creative, independent teachers working at the classroom level. It was not imposed upon them by a centralized bureaucracy (Kubey, "Information Age" 247).

a. Fitting news literacy into the existing curriculum

Determining precisely where news literacy fits in the curriculum can be a challenge both for teachers who are dedicated to media education and for district officials involved in

content oversight. The Webster University survey of Missouri's public secondary schools found that in response to the question, "What could be done to better equip teachers to integrate media literacy in their classes," 58 percent of respondents said there needs to be more clarification on how media literacy can be integrated into specific curricula (Douglass 6). In very few instances do schools have courses entirely or even primarily devoted to media literacy, and no standalone news literacy course was identified in the course of my research and interviews.

Aimone, the National Scholastic Press Association director, believes that given the curriculum pressures facing public schools, he is skeptical that a full course in the area of news literacy would be approved. The Center for News Literacy's Shultz has found that to be the case.

When we first started the institute for teachers, the intent was to help teachers develop the curriculum for a separate elective course on news literacy. What quickly became apparent was that as the economic downturn hit, schools didn't have the budget to add a new course. So we switched our focus to helping teachers integrate news literacy lessons into existing classes. (Schultz)

Mostly, media and news literacy units get tucked into existing courses, as they are in schools that take part in the News Literacy Project. And that is the way many proponents of media education prefer the field to be taught. Scheibe, the Ithaca College professor who teaches media literacy, argues that it is best presented as a pedagogical approach rather than a separate content area (62). The Center for Media Literacy agrees, stating that "media literacy is not a new subject to teach but a new way to teach all subjects ("Getting Started"). Still, when a school or district decides that news literacy should be integrated into existing courses, "it is easy for no one to own it. The result is hit or miss" (Aimone). When no one teacher carries the responsibility for teaching a subject like news literacy and instead it falls on everyone to try to integrate it into their lesson plans, it tends to get under-taught (Garrett). It often comes down to individual initiative, because,

It is on the teacher to be self-motivated to locate the resources [to teach the subject]. The job is hard, complicated and overwhelming some times, and it is not at the top of the list most time of what needs to be taught. It is not tested and no one is asking about it, but it is one of the most important things you can teach (Laufenberg).

Because individual teachers from a range of academic disciplines tend to champion news literacy, there is no single course where the instruction commonly takes place. Journalism classes, typically offered in secondary schools, would seem to be a likely home for news literacy. But it is hit or miss whether journalism or other media-issues courses cover elements of news literacy. “There might be a unit about understanding sources on the Internet, but mostly the classes are about producing rather than consuming news” (Aimone). According to the Journalism Education Association’s Kennedy, journalism and English classes are the most probable places to find elements of news literacy instruction – although anecdotally he does not hear about such units being taught often in either discipline. He is aware of English or language teachers who have students analyze Sunday morning talk shows, newspaper articles and television news segments as a way of discussing rhetoric and current events (Kennedy).

Teachers who integrate media literacy into their classrooms generally fall into two categories: Those wishing to develop students’ creativity and authentic self-expression, and those exploring economic, political, cultural, and social media issues in contemporary society (Hobbs, “School-Based” 43). Hobbs adds that, “Some schools emphasize primarily the study of media issues or the critical analysis of media messages, whereas other schools primarily provide students with opportunities for media production” (Hobbs, “School-Based” 44). She finds that in addition to English and communication arts courses, media literacy is also being taught through social studies, fine arts, health education, vocational education, and library skills. In social studies, for instance, teachers who ask students to analyze newspapers for content during election season. Hobbs writes that “media literacy education in the context of

English language arts has been highly influenced by the ongoing cross-disciplinary fertilization between the communication, media studies and literacy fields. Now, media literacy is no longer on the periphery of the English curriculum” (Hobbs, “Reading the Media” 7).

To the extent that news literacy makes it into secondary school classrooms, it is typically in the form of teachers turning to Internet-based news. The 2007 Carnegie-Knight Task Force study looked at more than 1,200 social studies, civics, and government teachers across the country who reported using news in the classroom. Roughly four-fifths of the teachers surveyed said they were making as much or more use of news today than as they were several years ago (just over half reported using news as a teaching tool “regularly”). Sixty-seven percent of teachers claimed “the Internet has made news use in the classroom easier and better” (Patterson, “The Internet” 5). Teachers primarily reported using a small number of national news outlets, including *The New York Times*, PBS, and CNN, to spur classroom discussions about relevant topics in their curriculum and to give students experience in reading media texts.

b. Teachers who have made the effort to integrate news literacy into their class

To better understand how and why news-literacy lessons make it into some secondary school classrooms, I interviewed several teachers about their experiences integrating the content into their existing curricula. Rowse, the Nebraska teacher, wrote the curriculum for her semester-long class on contemporary media issues, borrowing heavily from materials published by the Canadian nonprofit Media Awareness Network. She also integrates news literacy lessons into her English course, and brings up the media ownership issues in both classes. One of Rowse’s favorite news literacy lessons involves playing clips from “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report” and showing articles from the *Onion*, and asking students to identify the origin of the news nugget being parodied (did it appear first online, in

a newspaper or on television?) and list the facts of the story. “This underscores the importance of getting at the original source and not taking for granted that these shows are presenting straight facts” (Rowse). In the media issues course, she covers the importance of looking closely at polls conducted and reported on by the news media.

Laufenberg, the Philadelphia teacher, collaborated with the nonprofit News Trust on a program in which her twelfth-grade globalization class investigates a news source in a foreign country. The students at this public magnet school collectively review sixty articles per week from a mix of mainstream and alternative sites, including blogs run by citizen journalists. They evaluate how well the content is written, whether there is bias, how information is sourced, whether the stories are fact or opinion and, as a final task, whether the source is trustworthy. All of the students’ work is published online, and News Trust is paying close attention to how students respond to this type of project in order to determine whether it can be used as a model for other teachers. Laufenberg also regularly asks students to analyze news reports to determine what information might have been omitted and gives current events quizzes in which students are asked to draw upon the latest news. She describes her teaching method as “quite improvisational,” in that she rarely works directly from a lesson plan and prefers to bring in the day’s current events. Laufenberg considers news literacy to be “part of what I always saw as my job. I tell students all the time, ‘I don’t want you to be a sucker. You need to know not to always trust how messages are crafted. I want you to be able to identify when someone is trying to manipulate you” (Laufenberg).

Washington, the convergence media director from Richland Northeast High School in South Carolina, has also leveraged outside resources to help grow her media education program. Her school district won a grant that provides minority-serving magnet schools with funding for equipment to run media labs and institute related curricula. Beyond teaching students production skills, Washington uses examples of award-winning television news

reports to examine how the pieces were put together, including how sensitive material was handled by journalists. “For students to be critical consumers of the news, they need to know what goes into the editing process – what gets put in and left out. When they write their news stories, I’m looking at whether they covered the entire story.” Students at Richland Northeast begin by taking an introductory media course in which they look at how the news is reported and the ways in which journalists follow an ethical code. They are then eligible to take an advanced media course, taught by a professional journalist with experience working at a newspaper.

c. The journalist as a teacher of news literacy

Masterman writes that for media-education programs to be effective, “Teachers will need to develop a wide range of contacts with the media industries in order to keep abreast of current developments” (Kubey, “Information Age” 57). Collaboration between secondary school teachers and journalists has not always gone smoothly. Masterman notes that journalists have long been turned off by teachers who seek to inoculate students from what they perceive as negative mass media influences, and teachers have been skeptical of journalists whose classroom appearances amount to little more than public relations gambits. He writes,

Perhaps the least satisfactory form of input to a media studies course is a formal talk given to a passive group of students, extolling the noble role of the media in serving the public, and delivered by the editor of a local newspaper or a high-ranking member of a broadcasting organization.....

In my experience the cause of education has generally been better served by working journalists and broadcasters who can talk engagingly about particular texts which they have produced, and who can cast a critically informed eye upon their own practices (Masterman 265).

Similarly, Hobbs believes that journalists can be inspiring and motivational as speakers in news literacy courses. “But telling war stories about the good ol’ days does not inherently

work to develop critical thinking and communication skills among students” (Hobbs, “What Works and What Doesn’t” 4).

Bringing journalists into the classroom to explain their craft and what it takes to be a savvy news consumer can allow teachers to promote a collaborative learning environment. Rather than presenting themselves as experts in news literacy and the news media, teachers can assume their role as a classroom facilitator and learn along with students from the journalists’ presentations. This collaborative environment is the approach favored by the News Literacy Project. The organization aims to give students the tools to use and produce credible information in the digital age, distinguish fact from fiction, and develop critical thinking skills that will help them become more engaged citizens. Among the News Literacy Project’s stated goals are to help students understand the value of a free press, to increase teachers’ understanding of the Fourth Estate, and to encourage them to make greater use news and First Amendment lessons in the classroom. The specific questions that are the underpinnings of the project’s curricula are: Why does news matter? Why is the First Amendment protection of free speech so vital to American Democracy? How can students know what to believe? What challenges and opportunities do the internet and digital media create? (News Literacy Project).

The News Literacy Project helps teachers incorporate news-literacy units designed to last roughly ten days into their existing social studies, history, and English classes. The decision to focus on non-journalism courses was deliberate. “We felt that students who were in journalism classes or active on a student newspaper most likely already were consuming and creating credible information. Those students were mostly likely to get [what it means to be a savvy news consumer], and we wanted to reach everybody else” (A. Miller). The project provides teachers with hands-on exercises and other suggested curriculum material, such as an introductory video they can show to students, as well as a word wall of basic journalism

and news literacy terms that is intended to be posted in the classroom. Miller and others provide orientation and training for the teachers on how to integrate the new literacy unit into their existing curriculum. After teachers introduce the basics of news literacy, students typically are asked to read or watch the work of the journalist who is selected to visit the classroom. Teachers can request a particular journalist, but typically a project coordinator assigns the journalist based on what is being covered in a particular course. (A Mexico City correspondent might be selected to visit a class focusing on Latin America, or a political reporter might be tabbed to speak to a United States government class.) The News Literacy Project has more than 150 reporters and editors from publications such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Bloomberg*, *The Associated Press*, CNN, and NBC News listed on the online directory. The journalists also receive training from the News Literacy Project staff.

David Gonzalez, a *New York Times* reporter who has spoken at three New York-area schools, takes part in the project because he agrees with the mission of teaching students how to find credible news amidst the overwhelming tide of questionable content on the Web. Gonzalez spoke to students about how to verify information and how reporters develop a rapport with sources in a community. He helped students in one class complete a project in which they created a documentary about their neighborhood. Gonzalez said there is also an element of self-interest in his involvement – he hopes the students will get in the habit of reading newspapers. “Not everyone in the project will become a journalist, but the fact is we need smart readers” (Gonzalez).

Peter Eisler, an investigative reporter for *USA Today*, said that given the shrinking amount of original reporting taking place and the explosion of potential sources of news that provide unfounded assertions, it is imperative that “the next generation learns the importance of making decisions based on credible, well-researched information” (Eisler). Eisler has

visited five classrooms -- a mixture of social studies, English, and political science – to discuss current news and his own experiences finding credible sources, digging through government documents, and dealing with unhappy government sources after an article is published. During the 2008 election, he spoke about the lack of fact checking in the reporting surrounding Joe the Plumber, and the ethical questions that arose when a subject becomes a public figure whose background can be scrutinized (Eisler).

Kate Ferrall, program coordinator for the News Literacy Project, believes journalists add an important element to the News Literacy Project by explaining to the students how issues like detecting bias and finding credible sources, presented to them in hypothetical terms by their teachers, play out in the real world. Ferrall explains,

It's a chance for students to ask, 'When you're at the White House, how do you know what's spin, who to turn to for answers and what to write?' They start to see think closely about the connection between journalism and democracy. I'm not sure they have recognized that thread until journalists come in and say, 'I've covered the White House or North Korea. Otherwise, it's just a world history or social studies lesson that's flat on the page (Ferrall).

In the project's final phase, after the journalist's visit, students complete a final project based on the information they covered in class. Students have created their own newspaper, designed board games that ask news literacy questions, held a mock press conference and, in the case of Whitman High School's Chen, drawn up a flow chart that allows other students to assess their own media literacy. Kevin Kay, a sophomore at Whitman High School, worked with classmates on a video that responded to the question about why the First Amendment is important to democracy. His video created a dystopia where free speech rights did not exist (Kay).

The News Literacy Project finished the first full year in the classroom in spring 2010 with seven schools in three locations, including an inner-city middle school in Chicago and a suburban Washington D.C. high school. The schools involved enroll mostly low-income

minority students, although Whitman, a resource-rich suburban school, by far has the most students involved in the program. The project focuses on middle and high school students because “it is the time when they are starting to develop news and information consuming habits that hopefully will become a lifelong pattern. The teenage years are also crucial to determining whether at-risk students are going to succeed” (A. Miller).

Seven teachers and roughly 625 students in AP government and twelfth-grade English took part in the News Literacy Project in the 2009-10 school year. Robert Mathis, who teaches AP government and is head of social studies at Whitman, said he decided to spread out the journalists’ visits over the course of a semester so when the curriculum called for a conversation about media and presidential politics or Congress and the press, he would call upon a journalist who covered the related beat. “News literacy works well with the course because we are covering such complex institutions, and viewing them through the lens of a reporter gives students a different perspective” (Mathis). Kay, who took the AP government course, said he enjoyed hearing from reporters who covered the White House and national security. “One of the speakers was on board Air Force One on Sept. 11 with President Bush, and listening to her recount how she struggled to extract credible information back to her editors is not something we could have gotten from a textbook” (Kay).

One of the public schools that Gonzalez visited was Facing History School in Manhattan. More than fifty seniors in two English classes took part in the project in the spring on top of dozens of others in a tenth-grade humanities course who previously went through the program. Students in Kristina Wylie’s English course read “The Kite Runner,” which is set in Afghanistan and chronicles the human rights abuses that occurred under Taliban rule. The News Literacy Project brought to the school a producer from the CBS show “60 Minutes” who had reported from Afghanistan to talk about the challenge of sorting fact from fiction in a country where reliable information is hard to find. Wylie asked students to

write a hard-news article, feature story, and editorial – all focusing on an element of human rights violations. Gonzalez and other reporters had previously spoken with students about how to back up their ideas, conduct an interview, and go about researching for a news story. Toward the end of the journalism unit, a professional journalist visited the class, edited the students' work, and gave them one-on-one feedback.

The News Literacy Project in the summer of 2010 was in the process of assessing what the students who took part in the program's first year learned from these news literacy units. Among the questions and statements the project asked students before and after their exposure to the instruction: "There is a difference between news and opinion." "The information I get from Wikipedia is always, sometimes, never reliable." "What do you do when you receive a chain e-mail from someone – send it on, ask about the source or credibility before sharing, or automatically delete? How often do you read, watch or listen to the news?" Results are not yet available, but Alan Miller has received a letter from the principal at the Facing History School saying "in a short time we have seen the project make a difference in students' writing, in their attention to detail, in how they read and how they react to and understand a text" (Smith 1). The principal of Williamsburg Collegiate Charter School in New York, where the program was inserted into middle school history courses, wrote,

Through mini-lessons focused on evaluating sources and digesting news media, our students have begun to thoughtfully approach issues of bias and credibility when evaluating news. After participating in these lessons, we've seen our students leave equipped with the right questions to ask as they're researching using blogs, educational websites and even navigating their way through all of the NY-based print media (Julie Kennedy 1).

Student participant Kay now considers himself a more conscious news consumer. "The project reinforced in my mind that it is important to critically analyze everything you read in

a newspaper or online. It has increased my ability to vet sources, and I am now in the habit of checking multiple sources” (Kay).

IX. ELEMENTS COMMON TO NEWS LITERACY CURRICULA

News literacy is a nascent field, but a variety of curricular materials have been developed and in some cases are in use. The News Literacy Project distributes its curricular guides to teachers at participating schools. The Center for Media Literacy has a range of teacher kits that cover the basics of media education. The Center for News Literacy provides its entire news literacy curriculum aimed at college students, including a syllabus, electronic tests, and small-group seminar guides, for free to any university interested in offering a similar course.¹⁴ News Trust has given its curriculum guide to dozens of high schools and is starting to work with teachers in a variety of subjects, including social studies, science, philosophy, and journalism, on how to adapt the standard curriculum to their specific needs. Other organizations provide their free news literacy resources online.

There is substantial content overlap in news/media literacy materials. For example, many curricular guides mention the Center for Media Literacy’s “Five Core Concepts: 1) All media messages are constructed. 2) Media messages are constructed using a language with its own rules. 3) Different people experience the same media message differently. 4) Media have embedded values and points of view. 5) Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (Thoman and Jolls 34) Following is a look at some of the other elements common to news literacy curricula:

Introduction/Why News Matters: The News Literacy Project’s guide for middle and high school students starts by defining the core elements of quality journalism, which

¹⁴ At least 15 campuses, many of which have consulted with Stony Brook, are scheduled to teach a news literacy course in spring 2011 (Schneider).

include vetting sources, and being transparent and accountable. Students must then use them to demonstrate understanding of the content of the unit, and teachers use them to design assessments and monitor student progress. The point is that students should view quality journalism as a benchmark against which to measure other sources of information (“Essential Questions” 1).

News Literacy Project teachers are asked to use the “Elements of Journalism,” a widely respected introduction to the press that does not paint an overly rosy picture of it (the authors bemoan the resources spent on entertainment journalism and other types of “infotainment.”) Examples of topics covered include: how journalism helps democracy flourish in part by keeping institutions honest, the sordid history of yellow journalism and propaganda masquerading as reporting, and that despite the complicated and elusive nature of truth, “the first principal of journalism – its disinterested pursuit of the truth – is ultimately what sets it apart from all other forms of communication” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 42). The book explains that people who gather news have a social obligation that can override their employers’ immediate interests (Kovach and Rosenstiel 52), and that journalists face myriad ethical issues, such as whether to honor source anonymity and whether masquerading to get information is ever justifiable.

Stony Brook’s curriculum covers the “accelerating communications revolution, ranging from Johann Gutenberg to Jon Stewart,” noting watershed moments in history of journalism and mass communication. The curriculum covers the need to receive and share information and the historical function of news. The first lesson plan for teachers highlights the important distinction between “the media” and “the news media,” explaining that the media “encompasses the universe of entertainment and information, created and distributed in any format,” while the news media are a subset of the media that delivers news (Center for News Literacy Curriculum 1).

Several curriculum guides begin by asking students to pay close attention to their daily news media intake. The News Trust’s “Can You Trust the News?” teacher guides, which have interactive lesson plans for high school journalism, communications, civics, and social studies courses, first ask students how they get their news and whether they trust the news they read, hear, and watch. The Stony Brook course asks students to go without news for 48 hours in order to demonstrate how reliant they are on staying informed.

Identifying Types of Information: Schneider, the Stony Brook dean, said it is important to start each semester by discussing the difference between news, propaganda, and advertising, and to allow students to find the journalism amidst other forms of content. The course then covers the difference between news and opinion, inference vs. evidence, and assertion vs. verification. Students also learn about confirmation bias – the tendency to search for news with which you agree.

The News Literacy Project also teaches students the differences between news, opinion, advertising, publicity, propaganda, and raw information; between assertion and verification; and between an eyewitness, expert, independent, and anonymous source. Likewise, the Center for News Literacy uses an information grid to help students identify what kind of content they are encountering, and defines news as “information of some public interest that is shared and subject to a journalistic process of verification” (Center for News Literacy Curriculum 3). The Center for Media Literacy’s teacher kit emphasizes student recognition of who created a media message, the values and points of view represented and omitted, and who the target audience is.

The News Trust lesson plans seek to teach students to distinguish various types of news formats (including a news report, a news analysis, special report, breaking news, and

investigative reporting) and opinion formats (editorial, interview, speech, and comment) (Gorski).¹⁵

Reading Between the Lines: Many news literacy curricula emphasize tone, audience, and implied meaning. Project Look Sharp, run through Ithaca University, creates free online teacher kits that cover many of these topics. For example, one guide asks students to analyze newspaper cartoons of presidents and glean how the issue of race was used in the media to persuade voters in the period surrounding the Civil War, as well as how the partisan press' attacks on Lincoln's views on slavery affected the political atmosphere. Other lesson plans focus on the news media's primary role in shaping American public opinion about international conflicts. The lesson "Media Construction of War" uses images from *Newsweek*, such as a dejected President Lyndon B. Johnson, to draw students' attention to the ways in which the press portrayed American wars abroad (Project Look Sharp 17). Scheibe, the Ithaca professor who is executive director of the program, found questions such as "who made this message and what is their purpose?" and "who is the target audience and how is the message tailored to them?" work well with students from elementary school through college (63).

The Newseum, a Washington D.C. museum dedicated to the press, provides teachers detailed lesson plans. In one activity, the teacher downloads several front pages from the Newseum's "Today's Front Page" web feature that provides digital copies of hundreds of daily covers. Students choose a news story that appears in all of the papers to evaluate how the tone of the publications' coverage differs and to look broadly at how and why perspective on national and local news varies among the papers (Newseum).

¹⁵ Kristin Gorski is a former middle school English, history, and social studies teacher who worked on the News Trust curriculum.

First Amendment/Civic Engagement: Lessons commonly illustrate the importance of the First Amendment protection of free speech and how it relates to the press. The News Literacy Project asks students to learn “What five freedoms are protected by the First Amendment?”, “What do we mean by a “free media?”, “Why is the press sometimes called the “watchdog of democracy?”, and “Why is information so powerful that governments and others jail, kidnap, and kill journalists worldwide for trying to tell the truth?” (News Literacy Project). The Center for News Literacy curriculum also includes a unit on the “Power of Information,” which is demonstrated by the lengths to which governments will go to shut down information and people will go to find the information.

A news literacy curriculum called “Journalists and the Constitution,” created by the PBS show “Frontline,” covers the Founding Fathers’ views on a free press, the U.S. Department of Justice’s policies on subpoenaing reporters, and the reasons why journalists support laws shielding them from having to turn over sensitive information. The material, meant to be taught after students view the four-hour series “News Wars,” is intended to run for three to six class periods and also focuses on the idea of the news media as a watchdog (PBS).

The Newseum’s lesson “You Can’t Say That in School,” introduces to students the seminal First Amendment cases involving secondary school students. Students are asked to read poorly reported and written fictional articles as a way to illustrate that press freedoms afford authors the right to publish the material (however low in quality) and that the government cannot censor the content, although the authors assume responsibility for what they publish.

Lesson plans from Kids Voting USA, meant to be used around election time, introduce to students the importance of voting as a civic duty and of staying informed about elections, issues, and candidates by following news media coverage (Kubey, “Dawn of the

21st Century” 72). Several curriculum guides highlight the role of the press in keeping government institutions honest. News Trust’s civics lesson plan includes a set of questions for teachers to ask students to determine how well their local press fulfill their watchdog role by presenting unbiased, informative, and relevant information, or whether publications are missing stories that keep citizens from knowing information that could be important to their lives (News Trust).

Media Ownership: The News Literacy Project addresses how ownership of media companies affects what is reported and how it is reported. “Elements of Journalism” explains the “invisible” wall that should exist between the editorial and business side of a news publication to keep the business interests from affecting decisions about what to report. Several teachers interviewed employ lesson plans that address how news coverage is impacted when a small number of companies own a large number of newspapers, magazines, and television stations.

Internet and Digital Media: News-literacy curricula commonly cover the strengths and limitations of content posted on online sites like YouTube and Wikipedia, and the importance of critically analyzing the content given prominent placement in news aggregation sites like Google News and Yahoo News. The News Trust lesson plans ask students to plug a topic into a search engine and identify the listings as stories, advertisements, or both. Among the questions posed: “Are they from established news sources or unverifiable Web sites? What links are on the first page, and can you tell why they rank so high?” (News Trust). The Center for News Literacy devotes an entire lecture to “news on the net,” covering the growth of online usage, how the Internet is changing the news, tips on how to evaluate the legitimacy of a Web page, and the dangers of using Wikipedia as a primary source.

The News Literacy Project stresses the importance of determining the origin of a news nugget, as well as the impact of e-mailing, texting, and blogging on how people get their information. One such activity, called “The Power of Deception,” addresses the Internet’s value as a source of news and as a research tool. Students are given a chain e-mail about a controversial topic that they are told to assume someone they know just sent them. The students are asked to confirm who created the e-mail, whether sources are cited as verification, and whether there is potential bias. The assignment asks students to check the validity of the claims by searching key terms on Google, and then to discuss the reliability of the tabloid newspaper appearing as the first listed source. It becomes clear that the tabloid article is misleading, and that the chain e-mail is based on this erroneous story, which contains several wild exaggerations and lies. The exercise is meant to show students how misreported and unverified information can be repeated and spread wide on the Web (“Power of Deception” 1).

A Newseum lesson plan asks students to consider how the framers of the Constitution might have used the Internet (including Twitter, Facebook, and email) and modern communication to spread their ideas and messages. The Stony Brook course also covers issues such as the battle over Web content in countries such as China, and how to evaluate online information. One lesson is that story rank on news aggregation sites does not necessarily equal article importance.

Being Critical of the Press: News-literacy curricula occasionally ask students to examine the ways in which news outlets sometimes fail to adhere to high journalistic standards. The News Literacy Project’s curriculum overview poses the question, “Why have many people turned away from mainstream media as their primary source of news and information?” The project seeks to teach students to identify the kinds of news media bias, as well as why mistakes appear in news accounts and how journalists learn from their mistakes.

It asks students to think about how they can hold news outlets accountable when they publish false or misleading information.

The News Trust asks students to rate recent news articles based on overall quality of information, including fairness and depth of sourcing, to give them the tools to,

evaluate what they are reading by knowing how to judge what is correct, sourced well, compelling, meaningful, relevant and grounded in context. Developing these skills takes practice, and because of the Internet's guarantee of easy and constant access to news (of widely varying qualities), being able to evaluate what is factual, unbiased and useful is more important than ever (Gorski).

News Trust organizes "news hunts" in which students join news professionals, concerned citizens, educators, and others in reviewing and rating the quality of straight news and opinion columns from mainstream and alternative source.

Hobbs argues that news-literacy instruction is ineffective if it "lionizes the ideals of American journalism and the important work of the press and the First Amendment" while paying little attention to the realities of the modern news media ecosystem. She told participants at the 2010 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference,

All that focus on the ideals of journalism is mere propaganda if it is blind to the realities of contemporary journalism, where partisan politics and smear-fests are the surest way to build audiences. We live in a world where deadline pressure means journalists rely on corporate handouts and flog special interests, bloggers may be paid to write glowingly about products and services, and news aggregation services spread misinformation blindingly fast, sometimes leaving truth in the dust.

If a news literacy course leaves students frustrated with the fact that American journalistic practice today does not meet the idealistic vision we have for it as the watchdog on power and catalyst to democracy, if students leave the course having higher expectations for journalism, that's not the dreaded cynicism everyone seems so afraid of. Those frustrations and high expectations for journalism are what citizens need to have if we ever expect journalism to fulfill its social function (Hobbs, "What Works and What Doesn't" 5).

Indeed, news literacy instructors should emphasize to students that the modern media environment is far from ideal, and that their news-literacy skills will help them identify examples of poor journalism and content masquerading as journalism that are increasingly prevalent online.

Teaching Media Production: Some curricula seek to help students become more savvy news consumers by producing their own content. Goodman, the Educational Video Center director, argues that young people only truly understand the media ecology and how the media function by making their own media. Doing so allows them to “understand through their own experience the multiple layers of data that make up the television or videos they watch or the magazines they read. They can see for themselves how words can be deleted or added to sentences and made to seem as if they had been originally spoken that way” (Goodman 6). Kennedy, the former journalism teacher, agrees that most of the news literacy lessons that students learn come from producing their own work. “Students who do a school television news broadcast every week are learning about how easy it is to manipulate the viewer. Student editors learn how deadline pressure causes journalists to sometimes leave facts out of their stories. This is pragmatic media literacy” (Kennedy).

Media scholars acknowledge the importance of allowing students to produce and evaluate their own content. Share, the critical media literacy proponent who teaches at UCLA, endorses teaching students to be media producers as a way to cultivate active citizenship. He writes, “As students create their own media, they have the opportunity to disrupt adult authorial power and position themselves as the creators of new media message in their own voices and from their own perspectives” (14). Similarly, Buckingham notes,

Practical, hands-on use of media technology frequently offers the most direct, engaging and effective way of exploring a given topic. It is also the aspect of media education that is most likely to generate enthusiasm from students. Practical work offers a comparatively ‘safe’ space, in which students can explore their emotional investments in the media, and represent their own enthusiasms and concerns. (82)

University of Southern California media scholar Henry Jenkins argues persuasively that it is important to foster a participatory culture of media education, because youth are already creating media at a fast pace (7). The new digital culture, Jenkins believes, provides support systems to help young people improve their core competencies as readers and writers. “They may provide opportunities, for instance, through blogs or live journals, for young people to receive feedback on their writing and to gain experience in communicating with a larger public – experience that might have once been restricted to student journalists” (19).

Students can also learn news-literacy lessons through being challenged to respond to news organizations directly rather than keeping their analysis within the walls of a classroom. In “Reading the Media,” Hobbs writes about an incident in which then-Vice President Al Gore, during a visit to Concord High School, was misquoted by several news outlets. The students checked their videotape and discovered that the outlets had not reported his message accurately. They called the news organizations about the error in their reports. It took several tries, but finally they persuaded the newspapers to run corrections. Writes Hobbs: “Students were learning about the importance of talking back to the often one-way news media, shifting their own perspectives from just being critics and observers of the news to becoming active participants and players” (Hobbs, “Reading the Media” 96).

In her paper presentation at the AEJMC conference, Hobbs spoke about her experience tracking a program called Powerful Voices for Kids in which undergraduates and graduate students from Temple University worked with a group of Philadelphia charter school students ages nine to eleven on creating and implementing media-literacy lessons. The students analyzed a major news story from the past year – in this case, the violence that arose from the meeting of so-called flash mobs in the streets of Philadelphia. These students created interactive media (resembling a video game) of the event, discussed how the press

covered the violence, and why news is important in society. The teacher introduced students to the ways in which a news story is structured and other journalism basics. Students also visited the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to speak with editors about newsgathering and reporting. (Hobbs, “What Works and What Doesn’t” 1).

Hobbs reports that students who took part in the program learned, among other things, that the decisions a journalist makes can shape public opinion about people, that journalists make choices about what to include in their work because there is a lot of news and not much time, and that even a small word choice can make a message inaccurate (Hobbs, “What Works and What Doesn’t” 3). Among the reasons that the project was successful, Hobbs argues, is that the students were allowed to choose the news event that most interested them to analyze during class time, and that the students made the connection between the classroom activity and the real world. The instructor also paid close attention to how choices of words and images shape a reader’s perception of reality. (Hobbs, “What Works and What Doesn’t” 4) The focus on creating media allowed students to experience these lessons firsthand.

Use of Newspapers as a Primary Textbook: News-literacy curricula often treat newspapers as primary textbooks. Media companies have historically been eager to use the Newspaper-in-Education programs to give away or cheaply sell their newspapers inside schools as a measure of goodwill, and to cultivate future readers. The Newspaper Association of America, the NIE program’s administrative organization, promotes newspapers as being “the types of texts the student must understand in order to have a full and informed life now and in their adult years” (“High Five” 4). As stated by a recent NAA Foundation report, “A nationwide system of cooperation between newspapers and schools, NIE is designed to enhance student achievement and appreciation of the First Amendment in a variety of subject areas through the use of newspapers in the classroom” (Arnold 1). Garrett, the Texas

professor who wrote NAA-sponsored curriculum, believes the newspaper is an effective teaching tool for civics and social studies teachers, because, “It is a current source of information with information that is developed by objective authors who are interested in providing context” (Garrett).

As newspapers have faced dramatic cutbacks during the recent recession, NIE programs have sometimes been dropped or scaled back. In “a setback for schools that need the resources,” fewer schools are now getting free newspapers delivered as part of the program (Baker). Garrett has noticed a decreasing emphasis on newspapers providing workshops for student journalists and resources for teachers on how to implement the curriculum. The NIE report found that fewer journalists are visiting classrooms as part of the program, and that instructional material offerings have decreased substantially (Arnold 2). Sandy Woodcock, director of the NAA Foundation, said,

When newspaper-in-education programs were launched more than 50 years ago, they were lean. Now we’re going back to having one person running them, or it being a part of their job. Some things will never go back to the way they were. Some markets have eliminated programs and I’m not sure if they will come back (Woodcock).

Among the minority of NIE directors who said their paper had put more resources into its program, 87 percent claimed that a prime reason for the increase was the belief that the program is “one of our best ways to attract new readers at a time of declining newspaper circulation” (Patterson, “The Internet” 12).

Some newspapers have begun to offer Web-based instructional tutorials for teachers or parents who home school, along with electronic editions of the newspaper. NAA has found that newspapers are increasingly pulling back on paper delivery and instead delivering digital copies to schools, although the NIE in 2010 report notes that publications need to ramp up these efforts to keep pace with students who overwhelmingly are used to reading news online. Woodcock said newspapers that are moving increasingly toward digital delivery of

their products are responding not only to student preference but to teachers' interest in using technology in the classroom. *The New York Times*, for example, reaches roughly 2,500 Kindergarten through twelfth-grade teachers across the country annually through the NIE program. Some schools still get the print publication delivered, but more than 60 percent of copies as of spring 2009 were sent electronically to schools as free PDFs, according to Stephanie Doba, a circulation official at the *Times*. The newspaper creates news quizzes and lesson plans that give teachers ideas on how to integrate *Times* content into the curriculum. Many of these ideas are included in a section on the newspaper's website called "40 Ways to Teach the Times."

Having digital access to news content and instructional tools allows teachers to easily integrate the material into slides and other visuals that can be used as part of their lesson plans. It also enables them to develop assignments that involve employing digital technology to interact with existing news content. Examples include asking students to use layout programs to create a version of a newsworthy home page using already published articles, photographs, and graphics provided by a news organization, and to use video editing software to remix existing television news content. The main drawback of schools exclusively utilizing digital news is that students do not have the opportunity to pick up a copy of the publication in the lunchroom or hallway. Teachers can assign students to read online articles as homework, but nothing replaces serendipitous encounters with news within a school building, which is unlikely to happen when print copies of a newspaper or magazine are not provided.

The *New York Times* offers a curricular resource for teachers with its *New York Times* Learning Network, which, unlike the NIE programs, is run through the editorial department. Katherine Schulten, a former teacher, newspaper adviser, and literacy consultant at New York schools, is editor of the Learning Network's regularly updated blog, which began in

2009 and is geared toward elementary, middle, and high school teachers, as well as students, and parents. A primary goal is to reach students for whom reading a newspaper is not a family tradition. The newspaper knows through surveys that the children of *Times* subscribers are already likely to become future readers. Schulten posts opinion questions daily that are based on a news story from that day's paper on current issues, and solicits student responses.¹⁶ Students submit hundreds of comments each week, some of which are written solely out of interest rather than as a school assignment. The challenge is to cite recent *Times* coverage while considering what is timely for teachers at different points during the academic year. For instance, Schulten said she can count on American history teachers to reach World War II around March, and she thus keeps an eye on news items that reference that historic event (Schulten).

An extensive newspaper-related resource for teachers is the Newspaper Association of American Foundation's "High Five: An Integrated Language Arts and Journalism Curriculum for Middle School Students." The three-unit curriculum, intended for middle school students, treats the daily paper as a textbook. The project began in 2005 in response to a National Center for Education Statistics report showing that reading scores of American students – particularly those from low-income families – were on the decline. High Five also was intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of using newspapers to teach literacy skills. The focus was on teaching students how to access, analyze, and judge the accuracy of what they read (Garrett). The curriculum covers media literacy and the value of newspapers.

¹⁶ A recent blog post asked the following:

An article today reports on an increase in teachers caught tampering with their students' standardized tests and scores. Because those scores now often determine which teachers get bonuses and tenure, some say the higher the stakes are, the more teachers will cheat. Do you agree? Do you think this shows that changes in education, including the testing required under No Child Left Behind, are putting too much pressure on your teachers?

(Learning Blog, 11 June 2010)

Students are taught to identify target audiences in media texts and to recognize the relative merits of using different media for various messages. Units on free speech issues explore the scope of First Amendment protections, including censorship by government and school officials, citing relevant Supreme Court decision (High Five, Lesson B, 42). Students learn the craft of journalism, including how to gather information, write, edit and evaluate their final project, a newspaper of their own.

The High Five curriculum has largely been unused since that experimental program in the mid-2000s. But recently, Garrett and others involved in creating the High Five curriculum partnered with the Poynter Institute's News University to create a media education curriculum that incorporates many elements of High Five and heavily emphasizes news literacy lessons. The News U. course is online, free, and intended to be self-directed (it is supposed to take users two to three hours to complete). The NAA Foundation and Poynter are promoting this resource to middle and high school teachers and their students.

X. CONCLUSION

A well-informed citizenry has always been a necessary ingredient of a vital American democracy. The importance of citizens being able to determine the value of news and public affairs information has increased along with the number and range of sources in the age of new media. Educators and journalists have begun efforts to promote the adoption of news-literacy curricula. They have developed a range of helpful resources and convened conferences for motivated teachers across the country who will continue to be the driving force behind the expansion of the news-literacy field. Targeting secondary school students is an effective way to ensure that the instruction will reach a broad cross-section of the population. The teenage years often are when news consumption habits form that could affect

young people's participation in civic affairs for their entire adult lives. Teaching news literacy to secondary school students on a truly large scale will require a commitment by state- and local-level policymakers, and educators to lower barriers to its inclusion as part of the curriculum.

To this end, news-literacy proponents would do well to better demonstrate its effectiveness in promoting critical thinking and increasing student interest in consuming quality information. The effort will be well worth it, because the ongoing existence of an independent, vigorous, and high-quality press depends largely on the willingness of future citizens to demand and support it. Without an expansion of news literacy instruction in secondary schools, young people will continue to report in large numbers that they are overwhelmed by the amount of information online and be unable to sort the higher quality news from the other forms of content they encounter on a daily basis. A citizenry that is unable to identify and make decisions based upon information from trusted sources is one that is likely to become increasingly disengaged from public affairs. For American democracy to remain strong in the present century, it is crucial that the students who will soon be determining the course of the country become news literate.

XI. RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

The **Poynter Institute** (<http://www.poynter.org/>) is among a growing number of institutions that provide training to teachers who are interested in integrating news-literacy lessons into their curriculum. The institute, in conjunction with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, in 2008 hosted about forty journalists, students, and educators at a two-day seminar to understand and promote news literacy. Poynter's News University has a range of online media training programs for educators, including a boot camp for scholastic journalism advisers.

Temple's **Media Education Lab** hosts a weeklong summer institute (<http://www.mediaeducationlab.org/powerful-voices-summer-institute-overview>) for K-8 educators to learn about media literacy and ways to teach media production. Among the topics covered: How to best help children become critical thinkers in responding to media messages that shape their personal and social identity and their understanding of the world, and how to help children engage with storytelling and news reading comprehension.

The New York-based **Educational Video Center** runs an institute (<http://www.evc.org/news/2010-youth-powered-video-institute>) for K-12 educators who want to teach students basic media production skills. Teachers learn to use digital editing software and link production and analysis to critical thinking about the media.

Stony Brook's Center for News Literacy each summer hosts a News Literacy Institute for teachers.¹⁷ Funded by the Ford Foundation, the institute helps teachers from across the country learn how to teach news literacy to junior high, high school, and community college students. Teachers receive copies of all the teaching materials used for

¹⁷ 2010 marked the third summer for the institute. It began with a handful of New York social studies and English teachers and has grown to include middle school teachers and teachers from subjects like foreign language and history, as well as special education instructors.

the college-level news literacy class and are permitted to utilize the slide shows and other guides in their entirety. A curriculum expert helps teachers develop individual lesson plans. The center has held national conferences on News Literacy and has been training individual teachers who want to integrate news literacy into their curriculum for several years. Schneider said the goal is to create institutions for high school teachers that meet at locations across the country.

Ithaca's **Project Look Sharp** (<http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/>) arranges for professors in the school's teacher's education program to work with secondary school teachers in upstate New York on incorporating media literacy into their lesson plans. Scheibe, the Project Look Sharp director, said "We start by asking what teachers have to teach in their classes, and then built around that, with media literacy as the pedagogy." The project strives to provide teachers with ongoing pre-service and in-service training and mentoring in media education, and to help teachers create new and revised teaching materials. Its weeklong summer institute for teachers has eighteen slots. Scheibe works with teachers on how to develop lesson plans and utilize technology in the classroom.

The **New Mexico Media Literacy Project** (<http://www.nmmlp.org/>) is located at the independent sixth- through twelfth-grade school Albuquerque Academy. The project is considered an outreach project of the academy and is partially funded by the New Mexico Department of Health. Project staff members, including McAuley, the community education coordinator, visit classrooms across the country to promote media education. McAuley and her colleagues work with teachers on how to integrate media literacy, and the project recently developed a six-week media literacy course at a New Mexico charter school that asked students to deconstruct news articles and discuss what goes into the reporting process.

International training: There are a range of options for teachers who want to get training abroad. Among them are Canada's **The Association for Media Literacy** and

England's **Media Education Association**. The Association for Media Literacy holds summer workshops for teachers, offers an online course for educators wanting to learn more about media literacy, and plans regular conferences for teachers to share best practices in media education. The Media Education Association holds teacher training workshops and also trains media professionals who want to learn more about the field of media education. The association is among the groups behind England's Media Literacy Conference (<http://www.mlc2010.org.uk/>) for teachers, teacher trainers, researchers, and journalists.

XII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Tom. Telephone interview. 1 June 2010.
- Aimone, Logan. Telephone interview. 2 June 2010.
- Alvermann, Donna E. "Media, Information Communication Technologies, and Youth Literacies: A Cultural Studies Perspective." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 48 (2004): 78-83. Web.
- Arnold, Mary. "NIE in 2010." *Newspaper Association of America Foundation*, 2010. Web. 3 Aug. 2010.
<http://www.naafoundation.org/docs/Foundation/Research/NIE_2010ExeSum_v8.pdf>
- "Assignment: Media Literacy." *Maryland State Department of Education*, 2003. Web. 3 Aug. 2010.
<<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/medialit/mediagettingstarted/>>
- Baker, Frank. Telephone interview. 26 May 2010.
- Bethel School District No. 403 Et Al. v. Fraser, A Minor, Et Al. No. 84-1667, Supreme Court of the United States, 478 U.S. 675, 7 July 1986, Decided.
- Bowen, Candace P. Telephone interview. 9 June 2010.
- Brown, Jessica. Telephone interview. 8 June 2010.
- Bruce, David. "Media Literacy." *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 108, No. 5, (May 2006): 939-43. Web.
- Buckingham, David. *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003. Print.
- California Department of Education. "2003 Through 2008 Released Test Questions." Web. 14 June 2010. <<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/css05rtq.asp>>
- "Can You Trust the News?" *News Trust*. Web. 3 June 2010.
<<http://newstrust.net/guides/teachers>>
- Center for News Literacy curriculum. Stony Brook University. Print. 12 July 2001.
- Chen, Lucy. "Media literacy project write-up." School project for Walt Whitman High School. Bethesda, Maryland, 2009. Print.
- Christ, William G. "Assessment, Media Literacy Standards, and Higher Education."

- American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 48 (2004): 92-96. Web.
- “Core Principals of Media Literacy Education.” Alliance for a Media Literate America. Web. April 2007.
<www.mediaeducationlab.com/sites/mediaeducationlab.com/files/AMLA-Core-Princ-MLE.pdf>
- Crippen, Sarah. Telephone interview. 28 May 2010.
- DeRoche, Edward, and Galloway, Fred. “The High Five Project: A Report.” School of Leadership & Education Sciences, University of San Diego. Web. Sept. 2006.
- Doba, Stephanie. “Re: Circulation Figures.” Message to the author. 11 June 2010. E-mail.
- Douglass, Steve. “Media Literacy Education in Missouri’s Secondary Schools.” Webster University, 6 June 2004.
- Eisler, Peter. Telephone interview. 9 June 2010.
- Farrell, Kate. Telephone interview. 6 June 2010.
- Garrett, Sherrye Dee. Telephone interview. 8 June 2010.
- “Getting Started: Strategies for introducing media literacy in your school or district.” *Center for Media Literacy*, 2004. Web. 27 May 2010.
<http://www.medialit.org/pd_getting_started.html>
- Gonzalez, David. Personal interview. 8 June 2010.
- Goodman, Steve. *Teaching youth media: A critical guide to literacy, video production, and social change*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2003. Print.
- Gorski, Kristen. Telephone interview. 14 June 2010.
- Hagood, Margaret C. *New Literacies Practices: Designing Literacy Learning*. Washington D.C.: Peter Lang, 2009. Print.
- Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier 484 U.S. 260 (1988), Supreme Court of the United States. No. 86-836, 13 Jan. 1988, Decided.
- “High Five: The Integrated Language Arts and Journalism Curriculum.” *Newspaper Association of America Foundation*, 2005. Web. 3 Aug. 2010.
<<http://www.naafoundation.org/Curriculum/NIE/High-Five.aspx>>
- “History-Social Science Content Standards.” *California Department of Education*, 1998. Web. 2 June 2010. <<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/>>
- Hobbs, Renee. “A Review of School-Based Initiatives in Media Literacy Education.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2004): 42-59. Print.

- . "News Literacy: What Works and What Doesn't." Proceeding of the American Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) conference, Denver, Colorado. 7 Aug. 2010. Web.
- . *Reading the Media: Media Literacy in High School English*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2007. Print.
- Hobbs, Renee, and Frost, Richard. "Measuring the acquisition of media-literacy skills." *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2003): 330-355. Web.
- Hundley, Heather L. "A College Professor Teaches a Fourth-Grade Media Literacy Unit on Television Commercials: Lessons Learned by the Students—And by the Teacher." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 48 (2004): 84-91. Web.
- "Information Skills: Standard Course of Study and Grade Level Competencies, K-12." *Public Schools of North Carolina*, 1999. Web. 3 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/information/scos/infoskills.pdf>>
- "Information & Technology Literacy Standards." *Wisconsin Department of Public Information*, 1998. Web. 15 July 2010. <<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/imt/itls.html>>
- "Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age." (Part II B) The Report of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. The Aspen Institute, 2009.
- Ito, Mimi et al. *Hanging out, messing around and geeking out: Kids living and learning with new media*. Cambridge: MIT press/MacArthur Foundation, 2010. Print.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century." *MIT Comparative Media Studies*. Building the Field of Digital Media and Learning. Web.
- Jolls, Tessa. Telephone interview. 1 June 2010.
- Kay, Kevin. Telephone interview 5 June 2010.
- Kennedy, Jack. Telephone interview. 28 May 2010.
- Kennedy, Julie. "News Literacy Project." Letter from the principal of Williamsburg Collegiate Charter School. 28 April 2010.
- "Key Points in English Language Arts." *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, June 2010. Web. 3 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/key-points-in-english-language-arts>>
- Kovach, Bill, and Rosenstiel, Tom. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007. Print.

- Kubey, Robert. "Media Literacy and the Teaching of Civics and Social Studies at the Dawn of the 21st Century." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2004): 69-77. Web.
- . *Media Literacy in the Information Age, Volume Six*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1987. Print.
- . "Obstacles to the Development of Media Education in the United States." *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (1998): 58-69. Web.
- Kubey, Robert and Baker, Frank. "Has Media Literacy Found a Curricular Foothold?" Editorial. *Education Week*, 27 Oct. 1999. Web.
- Lankshear, Colin, and Noble, Michele. *New literacies: Everyday practices and classroom learning*. Maidenshead: Open University Press, 2006. Print.
- Laufenberg, Diana. Telephone interview. 28 May 2010.
- Leach, Craig. Telephone interview. 1 June 2010.
- Lewin, Tamar. "Many States Adopt National Standards for Their Schools." *New York Times*, 21 June 2010, Web.
- "Library Guidelines." *Ohio Department of Education*, 2003. Web. 15 Jun 2010. <
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?Page=3&TopicRelationID=1703&Content=72473>>
- "List of Benchmarks for Language Arts." *Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning*. Web. 3 Aug. 2010.
 <<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=10>>
- Luke, Carmen. "As Seen on TV or was that my phone: New Media Literacy." *Policy Futures in Education*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (2007): 50-58. Web.
- Manfull, Aaron. Telephone interview. 8 June 2010.
- Masterman, Len. *Teaching the Media*. London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985. Print.
- Mathis, Robert. Telephone interview. 2 June 2010.
- McCauley, Christie. Telephone interview. 20 June 2010.
- "Media Construction of War: A Critical Reading of History." *Project Look Sharp*, Ithaca University. Web. 9 June 2010.
 <http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/MCWarweb/vietnam/vietnam_tguide.pdf>

- Media Giraffe Project. "A consensus statement about the importance of news literacy."
 "Rebooting the News Conference," Temple University. Web. 25 Oct. 2008.
<http://www.mediagiraffe.org/wiki/index.php/Reboot-statement>
- "Media Literacy-State Literacy Report." *State Educational Technology Directors Association*, December 2006. Web. 3 Aug. 2010.
<http://www.setda.org/web/guest/stateliteracyreport>
- Meyer, Marianne. "Measuring Success!: The Positive Impact of Newspaper In Education Programs on Student Achievement." *Newspaper Association of America Foundation*, 2002. Web. 7 July 2010. <www.naa.org/foundation/measuresuccess.pdf>
- Mihailidis, Paul. "Beyond Cynicism: How Media Literacy Can Make Students More Engaged Citizens." *International Journal of Media and Learning*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009. Print.
- Miller, Alan C. Personal interview. 2 June 2010.
- Miller, Alan C. and Cunningham, Brent. "As journalism changes, so must you." Editorial. *USA Today*. 13 April 2010. Web.
- Miller, Dean. Telephone interview. 6 June 2010.
- Moody, Kate. "Marshall McLuhan: The Revolution is – Media!" *Center for Media Literacy*. Web. 3 August 2010. <www.medialit.org/reading_room/article617.html>
- National Council of Teachers of English. "21st Century Literacies." Web. 15 Feb. 2008.
<http://www.ncte.org/governance/literacies>
- "National Standards for Civics and Government." *Center for Civic Engagement*, 1994. Web. 24 June 2010. <http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=stds_toc_intro>
- "National Standards for History Basic Edition, 1996." *National Center for History in the Schools*, University of California-Los Angeles. Web. 24 June 2010.
<http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/>
- News Literacy Project. Web. 3 Aug. 2010 <thenewsliteracyproject.org>
- "News Literacy Project Activity #6: The Power of Deception." *News Literacy Project*. Print.
- "News War." *PBS Frontline*. Web. 4 Aug. 2010.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/newswar/lesson.html>
- Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President at University of Michigan Spring Commencement." Michigan Stadium, Ann Arbor, MI. 1 May 2010. Keynote address.

- Patterson, Thomas E. "The Internet and the Threat It Poses to Local Media: Lessons from News in the Schools." *Carnegie-Night Task Force on the Future of Journalism*, 2007. Web. 17 July 2010.
- . "Young People and News: A Report from the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy." John K. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, 2007. Web. 12 July 2010.
- Petroff, Susan. "Re: news literacy project." Message to the author. 9 June 2010.
- Purcell, Kristen. "Understanding the Participatory News Consumer: How internet and cell phone users have turned news into a social experience." *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. March 2010. Web. 17 July 2010.
- "Released Tests, Answer Keys, and Scoring Guides." *Texas Education Agency*, 2009. Web. 14 June 2010.
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=44&menu_id=793>
- "Resolution on Media Literacy as High School English Courses." *National Council of Teachers of English Position Statement*, 1997 (updated 2007) Web. 3 Aug. 2010.
<<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/medialiteracycourses>>
- Ruddell, R.B, and Unrau, N.J (Eds.). *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (5th ed.). "Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the internet and other information and communication technologies." Leu, D. et al. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2004. Web.
- Scharrer, Erica. "Making a case for media literacy in the curriculum: Outcomes and assessment." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. Vol. 46, Issue 4 (Dec.-Jan. 2002): 354-358. Web.
- Scheibe, Cynthia. "A Deeper Sense of Literacy: Curriculum-Driven Approaches to Media Literacy in the K-12 Classroom." *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 48 (2004): 60-68. Web.
- . Personal interview. 8 June 2010.
- Schneider, Howard. Center for News Literacy Summer Institute for Teachers, Stony Brook, New York. July 12-23, 2010. Address.
- . "News Literacy Outcomes." Media Giraffe Project, 2008. Web. 3 Aug. 2010 <<http://www.mediagiraffe.org/wiki/index.php/Newsliteracy-outcomes>>
- Schneider, Howard, and Klurfeld, James. "The demand dilemma and news literacy in schools." Media Giraffe Project at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute. Video.
<<http://newshare.typepad.com/mgpaudio/2008/01/video-the-deman.html>>

- Schulten, Katerine. Telephone interview. 11 June 2010.
- Schultz, Stephen. Personal interview. 13 July 2010.
- Schwarz, Gretchen, and Brown, Pamela. (Eds.), "Media literacy: Transforming curriculum and teaching." *The one-hundred and fourth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Part 1. Oklahoma State University: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006. Print.
- Share, Jeff. *Media Literacy is Elementary: Teaching Youth to Critically Read and Create Media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2009. Print.
- Silverblatt, Art. Personal interview. 11 June 2010.
- Smith, Gillian. "News Literacy Project." Letter from the principal of the Facing History School. 21 May 2010.
- "Teens Know What They Want From Online News: Do You?" *Newspaper Association of America Foundation and the Media Management Center at Northwestern University*, 2009. Web. 12 June 2010.
- "The News Literacy Project: Check it Out." *The News Literacy Project*. Web. 3 Aug. 2010. Video. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQc5SKhVjmk>>
- "The News Literacy Project's Essential Questions: What Students Need to Know" *News Literacy Project*. Web. 7 July 2010.
- Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District. Supreme Court of the United States. 393 U.S. 503. 24 Feb. 1969, Decided.
- Thoman, Elizabeth, and Jolls, Tessa. "Literacy for the 21st Century: An Overview and Orientation Guide to Media Literacy Education." Edition 2. (2008) Center for Media Literacy. Web. 3 Aug. 2010
<http://www.medialit.org/pdf/mlk/01a_mlkorientation_rev2.pdf>
- Tran, Leslie. Telephone interview. 11 June 2010.
- "Today's Front Pages." *Newseum*. Web. 3 June 2010.
<www.newseum.org/education/>
- Vahlberg, Vivian. "Fitting Into Their Lives: A Survey of Three Studies About Youth Media Use." *Newspaper Association of America Foundation*, Spring 2010. Web. 12 June 2010.
- Washington, Lynn. Telephone interview. 8 June 2010.
- Yalof, David, and Dautrich, Kenneth. "Future of the First Amendment: What America's High School Students Think About Their Freedoms" (September 2006 survey update) *John*

S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2006. Web. 10 July 2010.
<<http://www.knightfoundation.org/dotAsset/355985.pdf>>