

**Setting the Standard:  
Media Literacy Education in Virginia's Public Schools**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the state of media literacy in the middle school curriculum of Virginia's public schools. Through in-depth interviews with state certified teachers of English and Language Arts, the goal was to uncover student, teacher, resource, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students at the middle school level, while also uncovering teachers' perception of the Standards of Learning (SOLs) and the benchmarks for media literacy that are contained within those state directives. An additional purpose of this thesis is to contribute to theory building efforts so that media literacy education is better understood in academic literature, in higher education, and in K-12 curriculum.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While media literacy in the U.S. curriculum is a topic that has been discussed and debated for many decades, it was Hobbs' (1998) seminal article regarding the *7 Great Debates* that truly brought the concept into the mainstream. Since that article, much research has explored media literacy education and its implementation in the public school classroom. Many of the *7 Great Debates* Hobbs (1998) summarized range on today as the basic, fundamental, philosophical, pedagogical, and structural issues fueling the debates remain. Some teachers still view media, specifically popular culture, as the enemy and take a protectionist stance when teaching media in the classroom. Others believe that analyzing the texts of popular culture could help students better understand the media to which they are constantly exposed in their everyday lives (Hobbs, 1998). Some researchers believe that media literacy should be a stand-alone discipline, while others view that assertion as impractical, favoring that media literacy be incorporated across the broad range of courses in the curriculum. Opponents of the latter stance, however, fear such an approach will render media literacy invisible, and destroy all the work that has been done in order to make the topic relevant in the public school consciousness (Hobbs, 1998).

As Hobbs (1998) asserted, much of the research on media literacy focuses on the student as the subject, with very little research focusing on the providers of such skills, the teachers, who are ultimately relegated to the sidelines. However, Deal, Flores-Koulish, and Sears (2010) analyzed 10 in-service teachers in a literacy master's program who had recently completed a semester long course on media literacy. The authors uncovered several challenges, not the least of which was that several of the teachers misinterpreted the very meaning of media literacy, confusing it with technology utilization. Technology utilization, as the authors defined it, refers

to the simple act of using technology in the classroom, both by teachers and students. Media literacy, on the other hand, in addition to utilizing technology, includes the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the message. The other challenges Deal, et al (2010) uncovered for educators were “contextual limitations and restrictions, [media literacy] content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge” (p. 121). A limitation of their study (Deal, et al, 2010) stems from the fact that they focused on a narrow population of educators, each of whom was participating in a literacy masters program and had recently completed a semester-long course in media literacy. As such, their resulting study was highly specialized and narrowly conceived. The purpose of this thesis is to take a similar inductive approach as used by Deal, et al, (2010), but to broaden the population of teachers in order to build on the body of knowledge regarding media literacy in the curriculum. Considine (2001) posited that it could be “profitable to examine mandates on a state-by-state basis to see if the skills and competencies associated with media literacy are already being addressed” (p. 256). Consequently, this thesis focuses on educators in Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL).

Qualitative inquiry, in contrast with research done in a laboratory setting, aims to understand participants’ experience in context. The outcome of such investigations is not to generalize results; rather, the ultimate goal is create “a deeper understanding of experience from the perspectives of the participants selected for study” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 44).

Berg (1989) posited that an interview is a conversation with a distinct purpose. Through in-depth interviews with teachers with diverse teaching backgrounds, diverse experience, and a broad range of grade-specific education experience, the aim of this thesis is to uncover a variety of successes, failures, and challenges that illuminate the state of media education through the eyes of the educators on the front lines of media literacy education.

In order to satisfy the aims of the thesis, several open-ended questions asked teachers about a variety of definitional, contextual, and social/structural considerations. Teachers were asked their definition of media literacy to get a better understanding of how those explanations compare to definitions found in the academic literature or in state education standards. Contextual considerations included questions about teachers' implementation of media specific lessons in their curriculum, including the inclusion of popular culture, news and other mass mediated messages. Additionally, questions about teachers' perceptions of what motivates students were asked in an effort to better understand what drives student engagement. Finally, social and structural considerations were addressed through questions about socioeconomic status and parental involvement, and their impact on media literacy. The ultimate goal was to uncover student, teacher, resource, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students at various grade levels, while also uncovering teachers' perception of the SOL and the benchmarks for media literacy that are contained within those state directives.

State certified teachers were selected for interviews in order to provide further insight into how media education has changed and how the students' ability to critically analyze the media has evolved as technology has advanced. Ultimately, this thesis will conclude with recommendations for implementing media literacy education into the curricula, and for addressing continuing education of media education teachers. Since media literacy continues to develop, recommendations will speak to opportunities for academic research to address various hurdles that impede effective media education.

Piette and Giroux (2001) argued that media education, as it stands today, is inextricably linked to theories of mass communication and, as a result, is often relegated as a sub-discipline,



subsumed by the greater discipline of mass communication. They argue that, in order to stand alone as its own discipline, media education will require more research aimed at building theory derived from and dedicated to media literacy. As a result, an additional purpose of this thesis is to contribute to theory building efforts so that media literacy education is better understood in academic literature, in higher education, and in K-12 curriculum.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid advancement of technology has precipitated regular changes in the very definition of literacy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Hobbs, 1998). Due to the daily inundation of mass media, students today are besieged by messages transported across a variety of technologies and media platforms. Media exposure occurs not only in the home, but also in classrooms, through advertisement-laden content masked as public affairs programming (Austin, Chen, Pinkleton & Quintero Johnson, 2006). To date, countless studies have pointed to the potential ills inherent in mediated messages, including increased propensities toward aggression (Sharrer, 2006; Nathanson & Cantor, 2000), effects on alcohol and smoking behaviors (Primack, Sidani, Carroll, & Fine, 2009; Austin & Johnson, 1997), as well as the negative association between media consumption and childhood obesity (Evans, et al., 2006). These negative effects tend to be exaggerated in less affluent populations, leading to a widening of gaps in society.

Some view universal technological access as having the potential to bridge societal gaps; however, clearly other factors, such as socioeconomic status (SES) and motivation, play a role in determining the manner in which students use and understand technology and the media, as well as how they are impacted by the messages to which they are regularly exposed. Therefore, a better understanding of the knowledge gap hypothesis – which explicates the impact SES has on technology use – as well as an explanation of the tenets of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) – which includes the impact motivation has on social learning – are crucial to understanding the challenges associated with media literacy education. A clear explication of the knowledge gap hypothesis, and its relation to media literacy, follows.

### *Knowledge Gap*

As the second millennium approached, Gaziano (1997), in an update to a 1983 analysis of knowledge gap research, asserted that the economic gap between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ was at its highest level since before The Great Depression. In response to economic growth following the 1930s, Gaziano (1997) pointed to economic trends that appeared to equalize extant disparities between people across socioeconomic status (SES); however, economic policies and trends of the 1970s and 1980s, including changes in family structures and non-marital birthrates, caused sharp reversals of those trends. As a result, these widening trends don’t appear to show any signs of slowing down (Gaziano, 1997).

Many scholars have asserted that social power is often the result of knowledge (Hwang & Jeong, 2009); consequently, the disparity between those with social power and those without has often been referred to as the “knowledge gap hypothesis.” Originally offered by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970), the knowledge gap hypothesis states that, as mass media increases the flow of news about particular topics – such as health issues or public affairs matters, for example – the more highly educated segments of a population actually acquire that knowledge more rapidly. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970) expressed the hypothesis as follows:

As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between them tends to increase rather than decrease (pp. 159-160).

In the United States, discrepancies in income historically paralleled disparities in education (Gaziano, 1997). It appears evident that income allows access to education, education then begets the ability to acquire knowledge, which in turn begets higher earning capability. All

the while, those of lower SES tend to be further repressed by this patterned cycle that allows those of higher SES to maintain and even increase their social power. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970) asserted that the widening trend in knowledge gaps was likely irreversible.

As the late twentieth century ushered in the Internet age, scholars hoped that the unique ability of the Internet to provide inexpensive and rapid access of information to the masses might begin to reverse the widening knowledge gap trend. Thus far, this does not appear to be the case. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), while fostering participation among certain interested users, did not create the great Utopia many thought they promised. With regard to the impact of ICT on political participation, Lee, Ham, and Thorson (2009) found not only that the classic gaps in knowledge still existed in the Internet age, but that “new gaps [had been] created by the in-home presence of new media” (p. 2).

At the turn of the twenty first century, it was reported that 144 million Americans had regular, in-home Internet access (Rumblough & Tomlinson, 2000). As the new millennium continued, private, in-home access surged, tripling between 1997 and 2007 (Cauley, 2009). In fact, by 2007 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that close to 62% of U.S. households had access to the Internet, 82% of those by way of a high-speed, broadband connection (Cauley, 2009). However, despite this seeming ubiquity of in-home computer use, a vast majority of home computer users were White, and living in or near major urban areas. As a result, those belonging to racial minority groups, and those living in rural areas, appear to be at a tremendous disadvantage with regard to access.

Neuman and Celano (2006) examined a late 1990s program in Philadelphia termed “Leveling the Playing Field,” which looked to create equal opportunity among the citizenry by equalizing resources. Through a \$20 million gift from the William Penn Foundation, the

project's mission was to "transform 32 neighborhood branch libraries into a technologically modern urban library system" (Neuman & Celano, 2006, p. 176). In order to get a true assessment of technology use among low and middle-income libraries, the longitudinal study spanned six years so that data could be collected prior to the program's implementation, immediately after the renovations, and a year after the renovations, "after the novelty had worn off" (Neuman & Celano, 2006, p. 177).

While overall amount of use did not differ between those of lower and higher SES, Neuman and Celano (2006) found a stark contrast in the quality of use between these groups, with affluent, White children using the technology for much more sophisticated purposes than their lower income, racial minority counterparts. Consequently, the program, at the very least, inadvertently reinforced the gap, while potentially causing gaps to widen. This is but one reason there is a clear need for media literacy education, to help to close these gaps and teach children across all SES about technology and the media.

As Melkote, Muppidi, and Goswami (2000) noted, SES can be a very difficult variable to address, particularly because it does not lend itself to short-term interventions aimed at narrowing the knowledge gap. Therefore, it is crucial to "identify manipulable social, cultural, or behavioral variables," (Melkote, Muppidi & Goswami, 2000, p. 24) such as cognitive and behavioral involvement, that can be utilized to help reduce knowledge gaps. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) addresses such variables, and is therefore paramount to understanding the role motivation and behavior play in the knowledge gap hypothesis.

#### *Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)*

Neuman and Celano (2006) observed that children of lower SES used public computers as often as those of higher SES, but that the material the two groups sought was vastly different.

The authors speculated that motivation played a part in determining what types of information children sought, and how they evaluated information ascertained via technology, but did not delve into what factors motivated children of higher SES to use technology for more sophisticated purposes than their lower SES counterparts. Clearly, further investigation, rooted in theories related to motivation, are needed to link motivation and behavior – particularly as they pertain to technology use – and SES.

Sharrer (2005) discussed the importance of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as it relates to motivation and media literacy education, asserting that media literacy research needs to explore the application of SCT as “an explanation of the mechanism by which media literacy curricula may teach young people to be critical of the media” (p. 332). Lowery and DeFleur (1995) asserted that “attitudes, values, and behavior of any individual may be developed, at least in part, through observational learning” (p. 322). Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), states that people learn by watching what others do and reproduce the actions of others when motivated to do so.

The theory takes into account personal factors, environmental factors, as well as behavioral factors, as they interact and reciprocally influence one another. The theory conceptualizes behavior with a principal focus on both cognitive and social factors. As Bandura (2008) observed, “Human self-development, adaptation, and change are embedded in social systems” (p. 94). The four basic steps in social, observational learning are attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation, which ultimately leads to behavior. It is not necessary that these steps happen in rapid succession; it is possible, and in fact common, that behaviors can be learned without being reproduced immediately.

Social learning can take place in a variety of social contexts. Furthermore, small steps in learning can ultimately lead to big rewards. Through a better understanding of SCT and the fact

that various contexts can motivate behavior, it is plausible to imagine a snowball effect taking place, one that begins with just a few people using technology to gain self-efficacy with regard to public affairs, civic engagement, nutrition, health, and the like. Bandura (2008) made an astute observation that drove home this very idea:

“The more efficacious groups judge themselves to be, the higher their collective aspirations, the greater their motivational investment in their undertakings, the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments, the more robust their resilience to adversity, and the higher their performance accomplishments”(p. 97).

Indeed, research on media literacy education must rely on SCT, specifically how it relates to motivation and, ultimately behavior, to better understand the interplay between students’ socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, environmental factors, and behaviors. Bandura (2008) asserted that observational learning was best achieved when facilitated by role models, such as teachers, who could verbalize the importance of a particular set of skills, and the direct impact learning, or not learning, those skills could have on students.

Additionally, Bandura (2008) asserted that the “execution of a skill must be constantly varied to suit changing circumstances” (p. 124). As technology continues to evolve, and media conglomerates continue to develop sophisticated tools to utilize technology, the skills of media consumers, as well as those educators teaching media literacy skills, must continue to evolve, not just with regard to the critical thinking aspects of media literacy, but the production aspects as well. When discussing media production skills, it is important to have a clear understanding of technological literacy.

### *Technological Literacy*

Deal, et al (2010) analyzed 10 in-service teachers in a literacy master's program who had recently completed a semester long course on media literacy. The authors uncovered several challenges, not the least of which was that several of the teachers misinterpreted the meaning of media literacy, confusing it with technological literacy.

Interestingly, while several studies claim there are distinct differences between media literacy and technological literacy, several other studies tend to blur the definitions. McKahan (2008) defined technological literacy as “a set of tools to help students thoughtfully participate in the world around them; especially with matters that affect or are affected by communication” (p. 1). Cavanaugh (2005, p. 2553) outlined the six “Technology Foundation Standards for Students” that must be utilized by a society in order to provide comprehensive technology education to its citizens:

1. Basic operations and concepts
2. Social, ethical, and human issues
3. Technology productivity tools
4. Technology communications tools
5. Technology research tools
6. Technology problem-solving and decision-making tools (pp. 5-6)

While communication is certainly a component of technological literacy, several other components must be addressed when defining technological literacy. Beyond the communicative capabilities of technology, it is imperative that students understand the basic nature of the technology itself. With regard to performance, it is essential to recognize which



tools, such as hardware and software, as well as what level of proficiency, are necessary to perform a specific task (Breuch, 2002).

Although the media often require the utilization of technology in order to disseminate its messages, being media literate does not simply imply proficiency with technology. Also important to media literacy is a proficiency in analyzing and evaluating the messages being transmitted. As such, it would seem logical to assume that the analysis and evaluation components included in many definitions of media literacy set it apart from mere technological literacy. However, Breuch (2002) defined technological literacy as “the ability to read, write and communicate using technology; and the ability to think critically about technology” (p. 269), thus contributing to that blurring of lines between these two types of literacy.

Further exacerbating this conundrum, Thomas and Knezek (1995) explicated that technological literacy is more than just understanding technology and possessing the ability to use it. Also important is the ability to consider the context, and identify potential social, political, historical, and cultural factors, as well as issues related to access, that can influence the completion of a specific task (Breuch, 2002). Of equal importance is the consideration of linguistics as it pertains to technology. In other words, does the technology being utilized alter the way we speak in any way?

The fiscal welfare of both individuals and society at large has become ever reliant on complex technologies (Thomas & Knezek, 2010). As such, technological literacy is certainly an important component of K-12 curriculum; however, while both skills are important, there needs to be a clear understanding among educators, and within the academic literature, of the difference between media literacy and technological literacy to ensure that neither is being

overlooked or subsumed by the other. The following section attempts to flesh out a comprehensive definition of media literacy.

### *Media Literacy*

The Center for Media Literacy (2010) asserted that all mediated messages are created to gain power or profit to some degree or another. Consumers of media therefore require a variety of tools to properly interpret the myriad messages to which they are exposed in an effort to understand what product, ideology, or opinion is being sold to them. To do this, media consumers must be able to determine who the author of a message is, and understand the techniques utilized by the author in order to attract them to the message. It is also imperative that consumers be able to perceive various interpretations of a message, while concurrently ascertaining the lifestyles and values that are presented or omitted – essentially, the point-of-view of the author. Taking these tenets into account, the Center for Media Literacy (2010) defined media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in all of its forms”.

Vanmeenen (2009) asserted that media consumers must be able to understand not only the text of a message, but also the subtext. In other words, while understanding the explicit meaning of a media message is important, of equal importance is uncovering the implicit meanings that are often hidden beneath the surface. Such complex interpretations of the media require a sophisticated set of tools, tools that people are not born with, but must be taught. The Center for Media Literacy (2010) stressed the importance of media literacy as it pertained to “young people’s thinking about citizenship and social responsibility.” Media education, among other things, can be instrumental in showing students how the media frame public opinion. With a better understanding of how and why the media creates the messages it does, students will have

the ability to achieve self-efficacy with regard to important social issues, like public affairs, civic engagement, and health issues, to name a few.

Finally, Rheingold (2009) pointed to the explosion and ubiquity of social networking sites in the first decade of the new millennium when making the claim that twenty-first century media literacy meant social media literacy. While the preceding definitions may appear to further confound the issue of concretely defining media literacy, this could not be further from the case. When pooled together, these definitions offer a comprehensive list of the requisite skills one needs in order to be a media literate person. Therefore, an updated version of media literacy would include the ability to properly access media, the ability to evaluate the explicit and implicit meanings of messages, and the ability to analyze, and create media in all of its twenty-first century forms. School curriculum, therefore, needs to incorporate into the classroom more of an emphasis on exploring both the corporate mass media, as well as alternative, open sources, and social networking sites, in an effort to provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of the various types of media available today.

### *Media Literacy Education*

While the United States is the biggest exporter of media products, it lags behind every other English-speaking country when it comes to formal delivery of media education (Kubey, 2003). Despite evidence of the effectiveness of media education, and the fact that 48 states currently have curriculum that contain one or more media education components, Fuller, Damico and Rodgers (2004) asserted that the United States falls well below other countries when it comes to the emphasis placed on media education in school-based curricula. As Kubey (2003) asserted, “contemporary US education does not generally reward innovation” (p. 368), making it difficult for teachers to go against the grain and incorporate creative media literacy lessons into

their curriculum when not specifically outlined in learning standards and educational benchmarks that most states establish to guide curriculum development and student advancement.

As Kubey (2003) asserted, the media literacy education movement has been growing for over a quarter century. While media literacy in the U.S. curriculum is a topic that has been discussed and debated for many decades, it was Hobbs' (1998) seminal article regarding the 7 *Great Debates* that truly brought the concept into the mainstream. Since that article, much research has explored critical media literacy and its implementation in the public school classroom. Many of the 7 *Great Debates* Hobbs summarized continue today as the basic, fundamental, philosophical, pedagogical, and structural issues fueling the debates remain.

As these debates continue, it is clear that a movement has begun; however, this movement appears to lack centralization and organization on a national scale. The goal of implementing critical media literacy into the K-12 curricula, and moving beyond mere production techniques, which are viewed by many as an extension of vocational education (Hobbs, 1998), has yet to be fully realized. However, strides have been made, with various states' standards of learning incorporating media literacy skills into their curriculum. It is therefore important for scholars to scrutinize these state mandates to get a better understanding of the extent to which school administrators are mandating that media literacy be incorporated into the curriculum.

#### *Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL)*

As Considine (2001) asserted, it is fruitful to examine media literacy standards on a state-by-state basis. This thesis examines such standards as contained within the K-12 curriculum in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In June 1995, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

approved Standards of Learning (SOL) in four core content areas - mathematics, science, English, and history and the social sciences. In September 1997, the Board of Education established new Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA), in an effort to hold students, schools, and school divisions accountable for meeting certain benchmarks. If a certain passing rate is not met each year, it is possible for the school to lose its accreditation, thus setting higher standards for employment and putting onus on teachers and administrators to focus on fundamental areas of learning. Additionally, the results of the tests are made public, enabling parents to find schools with high achievement for their children, thus putting further pressure on school administrators and teachers.

Review of Virginia's Standards of Learning (VADOE, 2010) revealed that media literacy appears to begin at various phases in the K-12 process, with the majority of the emphasis on media literacy falling under the English and Language Arts curricula. Table 1.1 describes in detail media literacy components of the K-12 curriculum in these subject areas.

The real critical thinking pieces of media literacy appear to come in middle school - during 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. During this time, in the Oral Language sections, there appears to be emphasis on the media messages, persuasive tactics, point-of-view, and public opinion; each is a skill necessary to think critically about the media.

English and Language Arts teacher in Virginia are given opportunities to fulfill SOL requirements with instruction, assignments, projects, and initiatives that contribute the critical and productive capacity of their students in relation to media drawing on print, video, sound, and interactive web interfaces. However, few of the Virginia SOL pertaining to high school explicitly require pedagogical engagement with anything beyond print media. For the most part, media literacy and technology skills benchmarks in the high school curriculum are categorized

within the domain of research. Media literacy seems to fall outside of curriculum design and has more to do with individual teacher implementation, and the available resources that make it possible for teachers to create new and creative course design for encouraging critical and productive approaches to media.

Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on English and Language Arts teachers between the sixth and eighth grade, precisely due to the fact that it is during these stages of the K-12 process where there appear to be clear directives and benchmarks with regard to media literacy skills.

**Table 1.1 – “Virginia Standards of Learning: Media Literacy in English and Language Arts”**

By Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis on print</li> <li>- Should have awareness of logos and signs in printed media</li> <li>- discern graphics from text in printed literature</li> </ul>
Up Through Grade 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- several instances of statement “use available technology” in the classroom; little elaboration</li> <li>- students should be able to use online, print, and media resources to prepare presentations</li> </ul>
By Grade 7	<p>“7.3 (Oral Language) The student will describe persuasive messages in non print media, including television, radio, and video:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify persuasive techniques in the media</li> <li>- identify opinions in the media</li> <li>- identify facts in the media</li> <li>- describe the effect on audience of persuasive messages in media</li> <li>- identify effective word choice in the media</li> <li>- identify viewpoint in the media</li> </ul>
By Grade 8	<p>“8.3 (Oral Language) The student will analyze mass media messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify and analyze persuasive techniques used in the media</li> <li>- describe the effect of persuasive messages in the media on the audience</li> <li>- identify and evaluate word choice in the media</li> <li>- identify and analyze choice of information in the media</li> <li>- identify and analyze viewpoint in the media</li> <li>- identify public opinion trends and possible causes</li> <li>- identify the sources and viewpoint of publications</li> </ul>
By Grade 9	<p>“9.9 (Research):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify and use key terms, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- electronic database      - search engine</li> <li>- electronic mail          - World Wide Web</li> <li>- Web browser              - online services</li> </ul> </li> <li>- hotlinks</li> <li>- narrow the focus of a search</li> <li>- identify useful search terms</li> <li>- combine search terms effectively to narrow a search</li> <li>- scan research information and select resources based upon reliability, accuracy, and relevance to the purpose o the research</li> <li>- evaluate resources, both print and electronic, differentiating between Internet sources that are questionable and those that are reliable</li> <li>- apply the rules for responsible technology use</li> </ul>
By Grade 10	<p>“10.4 (Reading Analysis) all students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- compare and contrast product information contained in advertisements with that found in instruction manuals and warranties</li> </ul> <p>“10.6 (Reading Analysis) all students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- analyze the use of dialogue, special effects, and set to interpret characters</li> </ul> <p>“10.6 (Research) all students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use technology, along with other resources, to gather information</li> </ul>
By Grade 11	<p>“11.09 (Writing) All students should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use technology to access, develop, and modify documents for professional and informational purposes.</li> </ul> <p>“11.10 (Research)All students should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understand how to evaluate sources of information to determine reliability</li> <li>- understand how to develop a plan and collect information</li> <li>- understand how to use technology to access, organize, and develop writing.</li> <li>- utilize technology to conduct research, organize information, and develop writing.</li> </ul>
By Grade 12	<p>“12.8 (Research)All students should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- collect and synthesize information, using a variety of print and electronic sources</li> <li>- evaluate collected information by determining its validity, accuracy, and quality</li> <li>- formulating a reason/focus to represent findings</li> </ul>

### CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH GOALS AND QUESTIONS

Directed by the existing literature on media literacy education, this thesis uncovered student, teacher, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students at various grade levels. Additionally, it aimed to answer the following questions:

- RQ1: What are some consistencies and contradictions of the way in which public school educators define media literacy, and how do those definitions compare with those in the academic literature?
- RQ2: Are teachers able to communicate the media literacy components as detailed in the Virginia SOL?
- RQ3: Based on teacher perceptions, what, if any, structural and social factors motivate students to engage in media literacy instruction?
- RQ4: How do teachers define their role with regard to teaching students about the media?
- RQ5: What do teachers believe is the parents' role with regard to teaching their kids about the media?
- RQ6: Do teachers believe that SES plays a role in students' motivation and ability to grasp the concepts related to media literacy?



## CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

This thesis employed a qualitative approach in an effort to gain insight into the perspectives of the teachers, a group that is often overlooked in media literacy studies (Hobbs, 1998). As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) asserted, “The outcome of these studies is not the generalization of results, but a deeper understanding of experience from the perspectives of the participants selected for study” (p. 44). Directed by the results of an in-depth review of the Virginia SOL, which uncovered that the majority of media literacy benchmarks appear in English and Language Arts in middle school, this thesis focused on teachers of these subjects between grades six and eight.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The researcher, in a study of this nature, collects data and derives meaning from the data, meaning which is subject to change as the study progresses (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Eight total interviews were conducted with teachers in two different middle schools in the same county in Southwestern Virginia. Each teacher, at a minimum, had a bachelor’s degree and was certified in their respective subject area by the Commonwealth of Virginia, with years of experience ranging between two and 23 years (see appendix 4).

### *Participant Recruitment and Sampling*

Following university IRB approval, permission was gained from the director of research proposals at the particular county utilized for participants. A pilot interview, with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher within the county, was conducted in order to refine the interview protocol. Following the pilot, a recruitment letter was sent to the principals of two middle schools in said county, explaining the nature of the study, and the fact that the researcher was seeking participation from willing teachers of English, Language Arts, and related subjects to participate in a semi-

structured interview regarding media literacy. Inclusion criteria was based on the simple fact of whether or not the teacher was responsible for media literacy-related SOL for their school or district. Those who did not teach aspects of media literacy SOL were excluded; as such, the results from the pilot study were excluded from the results section, as this teacher did not meet grade and subject specific criteria. No gender, age, health, or ethnicity factors were used to exclude participants from this thesis. All teachers meeting either the grade or the subject criteria were potential participants for inclusion in this thesis.

With help from each principal, eight potential participants were identified. As Maykut and Morhouse (1994) asserted, this type of sampling “increases the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data, in contrast to random sampling which tries to achieve variation through the use of random selection and large sample size” (p. 45). Each participant was contacted, during which time the nature of the study was disclosed; however, specific questions were not furnished so as to ensure the nature of the conversations were natural, candid, and unprompted.

### *Data Collection*

This thesis utilized an analytic inductive approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to look beyond the literature and build upon extant theoretical frameworks (Strauss & Corbin, 1999); however, this approach was slightly modified as explicated by Allen whereby all of the data was collected prior to beginning analysis (K. Allen, personal communication, October 5, 2010).

A qualitative interview, unlike a traditional journalism interview, is a form of discourse rich with discussions of feelings and thoughts (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Semi-structured interviews, lasting roughly 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted during the week, after school

hours, and were held in the teachers' classrooms. Prior to beginning questions, the interviewees were given ample time to review and sign a consent form (see appendix 1), which explains the purpose of the thesis, potential harmful effects of participating in the thesis, and the intention of the research team to keep all participants' identities confidential.

The semi-structured interview questions and associated probes (see appendix 2) were open-ended and attempted to invite conversation in an effort to answer the research questions. The questions cover the six question categories outlined by Patton (1990), including experience/behavior questions; opinion/value questions; feeling questions; knowledge questions; sensory questions; and background/demographic questions. There are 6 research questions in this thesis.

RQ1 deals with the definitions of media literacy and were evaluated by the participant answers to the following questions: "How would you define literacy?" "How would you define media literacy?" "How has your perception of what media literacy means changed over the years?"

RQ2 deals with teachers' interpretations of the Virginia SOL and were evaluated through responses to the following question and related probe: "What is your understanding of the Virginia SOL as far as including media in the classroom (Probe: benchmarks where the kids are supposed to be; lessons clearly linked to those)?"

RQ3 deals with teachers' perceptions of students' motivations and engagement with lessons, and influence of media, technology and popular culture texts on student learning. These questions were evaluated through the responses to the following questions and probes:

Have you had an opportunity to include lessons specific to media literacy in your classroom?

- a. If so, tell me about what you have done? (Probe: amount of time, topic, grouping, resources)
- b. Why did you choose to approach it in this manner? (Probe: linked to existing units/lessons, student interest)
- c. How did you evaluate student learning? (Probe: does the VA SOL give any tips on how to evaluate/assess levels of media literacy)
- d. How did your students respond? (Probe: what did they do and say?)

Much has been said about incorporating popular culture into the classroom: do you think this can be helpful in engaging the students? Do you think it gets things off track?

(Probe: do you think they have enough media exposure outside of school, and so class time is a time to get them back to “basics”?)

From your point-of-view, what is it that motivates kids to learn, to be engaged?

How does the introduction of media in the lessons facilitate or impede student engagement?

Do you see your students’ sense of identity being shaped by media?

If yes, how? (Probe: fashion; interests; hopes; self-esteem, self-image; what is cool vs. un-cool; in vs. out; prized vs. marginalized)

RQ4 deals with teachers’ perceptions of their personal role in media literacy education, and was evaluated through participant responses to the following questions and probes: “What do you think is your role in teaching kids about the media (Probe: protect them from it; teach them to question sources; understand persuasive tactics)?”

RQ5 deals with teachers' perceptions of what the parents' role is in teaching their kids about the media, and was evaluated through participant responses to the following questions and probes: "What do you think is the role of parents (Probe: overlap and conflict with other subject areas, as well as cases in which there may be parental neglect vis-à-vis media education; kids baby-sat by TV; latch-key kids)?"

RQ6 deals with teachers' perceptions of SES and other factors that could potentially play a role in students' ability to grasp media literacy concepts. This question will be evaluated by the following questions: "Do you perceive a difference between kids that are heavily involved in extracurriculars (vs. those who are not) with regard to how they comprehend the media literacy aspects of your curriculum?"; "Do kids of different SES grasp media literacy concepts differently?"

At the completion of the interview, each participant was furnished with a debriefing statement (see appendix 3) which included links to media literacy education resources. Additionally, the researcher requested permission to contact the interviewee at a later date should any clarifications of the conversations be necessary. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher to ensure accuracy; names and demographic information were excluded from the transcripts, with each interviewee's name being replaced by a study code (i.e. "Interviewee A").

### *Data Analysis*

Once the interviews were complete and the conversations transcribed, the analysis portion of the thesis commenced, employing the coding process outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Maykut and Morehouse (1994), and Allen (2010). The process began with 'open coding', whereby a list of emerging themes relating to each of the six RQ's were identified.

During ‘axial coding’ the large list of themes coalesced into between two and four major and minor themes related to each RQ. Each theme is supported by ideas expressed during the interviews, as well direct quotations from several teachers.

Through a detailed examination of these major and minor, the ultimate goals of this thesis were the following: uncover student, teacher, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students at various grade levels; determine teachers’ definitions of media literacy to get a better understanding of how their definitions compare to those definitions found in the academic literature; uncover teachers’ understanding of the SOL and the benchmarks for media literacy that are contained within those state directives; to gain understanding of teachers’ perceptions of their role regarding teaching students about media; to gain insight into teachers’ beliefs regarding parents’ roles in teaching kids about media; to understand teachers’ perceptions of the role SES plays in media literacy, motivation, and knowledge gaps; and to contribute to theoretical building efforts so that media literacy education is better understood in academic literature, in higher education, and in K-12 curriculum.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The results are presented in six categories, with each category representing answers to one of the six research questions. With each question, both major and minor themes were uncovered. Major themes are defined as those supported and explicated by a majority of the participants, whereas minor themes are defined as those themes supported and explicated by a smaller number of teachers; these minor themes were compelling enough to be included in the results, as they touched on ideas and beliefs about which the teachers were very passionate. Direct quotations from the various participants are used to support each theme.

### *Defining Media Literacy*

RQ1 aimed at determining teachers' definitions of media literacy. Through their answers to a variety of interview questions and probes, three distinct categories of responses emerged: *definition of media literacy was in line with the academic literature; blurring of technological literacy and media literacy*; and a complete *unfamiliarity with media literacy*. Each of these themes is briefly described below, followed by direct quotations from participants whose comments support these themes.

#### *Definition of media literacy in line with literature*

Utilizing the definition of media literacy as “the ability to *access, analyze, evaluate, and produce* media in all of its forms,” three of the seven teachers appeared to have a strong grasp of media literacy, and included each of the components, to one degree or another, in their definitions of media literacy. Some of those definitions were as follows:

Participant B: “I think of media literacy as an understanding of how various media – TV, Internet, radio – how they influence our lives and how they help shape our understanding of the world...and understanding that there is always some sort of effect, even if we're

not cognizant of it. Traditional text is a little harder for them to access, as a general rule, and not just the kids who normally would struggle with printed text.”

Participant D: “When we’re speaking about media literacy, we’re speaking about the ability to get information from the various formats that are available to the public...the vehicles for communication, about events in the world or whatever – news, weather, whatever. I think of media literacy as the ability to discern, the ability to vet, the ability to not only comprehend what you’re getting from TV, newspaper, Internet, iPhones and the various places, but also to be able to sift out what is reliable and valid and what is not...Purpose, audience, and intentions behind the media are all a part of it as well.”

Participant E: “I think many people define it in terms of thinking about advertising, and advertisements in film, but I think, for me, in teaching students media literacy, means being critical about the images and ideas that you’re being presented with on a daily basis, and how do you interpret those for yourself. Production is also important, as you’re interpreting or figuring out the world around you through those things.”

As these comments reveal, some teachers appeared to have a clear understanding of media literacy as explicated in the academic literature, and had a firm grasp of the various components – access, analysis, evaluation, and production – included in the literature.

#### *Confusing technological literacy with media literacy*

Technological literacy – which appears to only cover the *access and production* components of media literacy – was confused by two of the seven teachers. While a minor premise, it is important to point out this confusion between technological literacy and media literacy, whereby these teachers left out important definitional components of media literacy. The two supporting responses were as follows:



Participant G: “When I think of media literacy, I think of texting, video games. It makes me think about technology, and students being able to communicate through technology...emails, and texting, and the whole Internet world. And absolutely the ability to produce blogs, PowerPoints, and things like that.”

Participant H: “Media literacy, to me, is the knowledge of different types of media and how to properly use them. I’d include computers, things like smartboards, different types of computers – laptops, desktops, iPods, cell phones, and things like that.”

Based on these comments, it is apparent that many of the teachers seemed to blur the lines between technological literacy and media literacy. In the above referenced quotes, teachers discussed access and production abilities – such as the use of texting and emails – but neglected to discuss the analytic and evaluative components of media literacy that exist in most academic definitions of media literacy.

#### *Unfamiliar with media literacy*

Two of the educators interviewed were unfamiliar with the term media literacy, and instead offered their opinion of how literacy has changed throughout the course of their career. Those responses were as follows:

Participant C: “Our school has started a new approach to literacy...we talk about the precepts of literacy, and what that means. For me, literacy obviously means – as an English teacher – the concept of being able to read and comprehend. But then you know you can go beyond that, and talk about cultural literacy – being able to read your environment – and being able to tell about a person from their appearance. Then you get into persuasive language and writing, where people wear designer clothes as a badge.”

Participant F: “This group of students’ whole career has been with technology. To make sure they’re literate in today’s world, beyond just reading a book, they have to know how to find information on the Internet. A great example (of how literacy has changed) – I showed them an encyclopedia, a hardback, real encyclopedia – and they didn’t know what it was.”

While a minor premise, it is important to note that, in light of these comments, it is evident that not all teachers are familiar with the term media literacy.

### *Interpreting and articulating media literacy components in the Virginia SOL*

The purpose of RQ2 was to determine if the teachers had a clear understanding of the media literacy benchmarks included in the Virginia SOL. While discussion of the SOL during these interviews did not reveal a great deal of insight, it is important to discuss teachers’ interpretations of those mandates as they pertain to media literacy. One major topic – the *focus of the Virginia SOL on persuasion* - was supported by most of the participants. Two minor concepts – *a lack of familiarity with media literacy in the SOL* and *a belief that media literacy components of the Virginia SOL are altogether vague* – were supported by some of the participants.

#### *Focus on persuasion*

During grades seven and eight, several benchmarks relating to persuasive language and persuasion in the media are to be met according to the SOL guidelines. Four of the five participants who taught those grades appeared to have a clear understanding of those state directives. Some of their responses supporting this notion were as follows:

Participant B: “The way the SOL tends to assess things like persuasive techniques is, there are maybe 4 or 5 that they really focus in on. I’ll teach them about persuasive

techniques, we'll explore different examples of it, and we'll see how well they can understand how to identify the techniques, how advertisers use them, how people who are trying to be persuasive use them.”

Participant C: “Persuasive language and bandwagon – those types of terms are part of the SOL and important things we have to cover.”

Participant E: “There are certain persuasive techniques they need to know for analyzing an advertisement; they also need to know how to write a persuasive essay.”

In light of the fact that four of the five participants discussed persuasion, the teachers conveyed a clear and consistent understanding of the emphasis the Virginia SOL place on persuasion. This includes the ability to analyze a persuasive document, and the ability to produce a piece of persuasive writing.

#### *Unfamiliar with media literacy in the SOL*

Two of the interviewees were unfamiliar with any media literacy benchmarks appearing in the SOL. While a minor idea only supported by answers from two teachers, it is still important to note this concept. The two responses supported this minor theme were as follows:

Participant F: “[There is] not a whole lot on media stuff – not really familiar with them. [They are] mostly about research, how to find sources; they’re supposed to know how to use on-line resources for research.”

Participant G: ““They have technology SOLs and there are some things embedded in there – don’t know them off the top of my head. I know 8<sup>th</sup> grade does a research project every year, and they can use books or electronic resources, and they get a list of databases they can use to get their information.”

These observations reveal that some of the teachers are unaware of the media literacy benchmarks located within the Virginia SOL.

*SOL found to be vague regarding media literacy skills*

While another minor concept, supported by just two of the participants, it is worth noting that these teachers felt the SOL to be either limited or vague when pertaining to media literacy skills. This is in direct contrast to the major theme, whereby most of the teachers found the directives in the SOL to be very clear regarding media literacy skills. The responses supporting this minor theme were as follows:

Participant D: “The SOL states that they have to have basic research skills. But they’re very vague...it’s big ideas, like research tools, teaching writing a persuasive piece. It’s divided into speaking, reading, and writing. It’s very general.”

Participant E: “The SOL, in terms of media, is really kind of limited. We have one, there are certain persuasive techniques they need to know for analyzing an advertisement.

Really, the English SOLs are pretty broad – they need to know how to write a persuasive essay.”

As a result of these remarks, it is evident that some of the teachers found the media literacy elements of the SOL to be vague or incomplete. However, it is worth noting that, while this perceived ambiguity frustrated some teachers, others felt a sense of freedom resulting from the language contained within the media literacy portions of the SOL.

*Motivation and engagement*

RQ3 was concerned with the ideas of motivation and engagement. Several interview questions were aimed at gauging the teachers’ perceptions of what types of things motivate their students to learn, and keep them engaged during lessons. Three major ideas – *interaction with*

*technology as motivator; inclusion of popular culture as motivator; and a need for choices* – were supported by a many of the teachers. Additionally, one minor concept – *a caution of technology overload and fatigue* – emerged during the interviews.

#### *Interaction with technology and new texts*

Six of the seven teachers interviewed agreed that technology – particularly items that were new to their students – engaged their kids. These teachers also discussed the impact of new, non-traditional texts, and how they helped to engage students more so than traditional, paper-based texts. Some of the responses supporting this idea were as follows:

Participant B: “Aside from my relationship with these students, and them knowing I care about them, I think the next most motivating factor is the ability to use technology.”

Participant F: “They love to come up and do hands-on stuff. Some kids need the lecture, some need the visual, but they all want to come up and touch the board, write on it...they like to have things in their hands.”

Based on these comments, these teachers believe that interaction with technology, and learning-by-doing, play a pivotal role in motivating and engaging their students. Just including technology in the lessons, and using items such as the smartboard, are not enough; rather, it is important for the students to actually put their hands on the technology, and to interact with the equipment, to be fully engaged.

#### *Inclusion of popular culture*

Not one of the teachers interviewed was against the usage of popular culture in the classroom; in fact, each of the seven teachers incorporated popular culture, to some degree or another, as a motivation and engagement tool. Some of the responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant E: “I don’t feel that there’s a line between what can come in the classroom and what stays outside of it...I think that whatever you can use to grab your students’ interest, you need to use it. I don’t think there should be limits.”

Participant G: “Whatever can engage them is fair game. I use movies as counterparts to novels , and compare and contrast the two, and that works so well to get them engaged, get them talking.”

Participant H: “I do YouTube videos a lot for introductions to a story or just to give them more of a background of what they’re reading about...they’re more interested when I do those types of things. I think popular culture is important – if it gets them interested, I don’t care; I’ll use it.”

As a result of these remarks, it is clear that these teachers do not believe that popular culture is a deterrent or a distraction in the classroom. In fact, most of the teachers felt that it was imperative to include popular culture – items that resonate with their students – in order to gain and maintain their students’ attention. Popular culture is clearly an important tool in achieving student engagement.

#### *A need for choices*

A minor concept that arose was the need for choices. While only two of the teachers mentioned this as a tool for keeping their students motivated, it was something about which each of these teachers spoke passionately. The responses supporting this idea were as follows:

Participant C: “I always try and build in some kind of choice, rather than have them all doing the exact same project. I think if they have a choice, within the realm of what we’re studying, what the lesson is, then they’ll be more engaged and I’ll get better work handed in to me.”

Participant E: “I let them have a lot of choice, with what they read, and with writing assignments. Allowing them choice in their topics is really important.”

As these remarks indicate, relying on standard reading lists and making sure students are all doing the same projects has gone by the wayside in the modern classroom. Students appear to crave choices, and need variety in order to be motivated to put their full effort into a project or assignment.

### *Warning of fatigue*

While media and technology were seen by most teachers as necessary tools for engaging the modern-day student, four of the seven teachers cautioned of overexposure to technology and resultant fatigue that can occur. As such, they discussed the need for limits regarding the use of media and technology in the classroom. Some responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant B: “With technology stuff in general, they tend to get burnt out, usually a couple of days before we’re actually finished [with a lesson], because they run up against walls. One thing I think about it is that, that’s part of being a part of our society, but you have to be careful and step away from technology from time to time.”

Participant C: “Technology definitely motivates them...but not all the time. Some say, ‘I don’t like PowerPoints all the time in class.’ You have to remember that anything when done routinely becomes routine, and so I see technology as another tool you use, but you have to limit that use just like with anything else.”

Participant D: “I love a lot about this digital era; it’s made my job so interesting. Though sometimes it’s just information overload, and we have to unplug.”

It is important to note that, based on these comments, some of the teachers fear technology overload and a resultant fatigue, and thus recommend unplugging from time to time.

*The teacher's role with the media*

RQ4 was aimed at ascertaining the teachers' perceptions of their role regarding the media. Many of the teachers interviewed spoke of the immense amount of "screen time" their students received on a daily basis, both in school and at home. As a result, all teachers believed that they played an important role with respect to teaching their students about the media and how to view it. Throughout these interviews, two major concepts – *fostering critical thinking*; and *creating informed citizens* - and one minor concept – that of *encouraging safety on the Internet* – emerged.

*Fostering critical thinking*

Five of the seven teachers addressed the notion of critical viewing. These teachers believed that part of their role in teaching their students about the media revolved around teaching them to think critically about the media, to question sources, and to be able to discern a credible source from a non-credible source. Some of the responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant D: "Sound bites are so influential. My job is difficult, but I have to encourage them to think critically. I need to teach them how to access information...how to vet it. It's my job to encourage them to go to multiple resources, and always go to multiple voices."

Participant E: "I think that my role is to help them to question source. Exposing them to ideas...to make them think about what the messages are in the media that they're being exposed to and how you interpret it – that's my role. To make them question, have conversations with each other, and to be thinking critically about those topics."

Participant G: "We need to teach them not to believe everything they see and read...you



need to be educated and knowledgeable about these things so you can make smart decisions.”

These insights clearly reveal that these teachers believe they play an extremely important role in teaching their students about the media. They feel it is extremely important to foster a critical attitude toward the media, and to ensure that their students are consistently questioning sources, and seeking out alternative viewpoints.

### *Creating informed citizens*

Four of the seven teachers spoke of the importance of information, and saw in their role as educators the need to create an informed citizenry. Some of the responses supporting this idea were as follows:

Participant C: “I want them to be aware about the world –as opposed to merely informing them, I encourage them to inform themselves and try and give them some tools to do so effectively. I think it’s good to encourage them to be curious about the world and to seek out information.”

Participant D: “Democracy is based on the fact that citizens are educated – this doesn’t mean they have to believe the same thing. But it does mean that you can’t be ignorant.”

Participant G: “We need to create educated adults that are going to be able to be successful out in the world...I know technology is growing day-by-day...we need to be able to create educated citizens that can adapt to the changes and be successful.”

Consequently, it is evident that these teachers feel a great responsibility with regard to creating an informed citizenry, particularly in this ever-evolving world in which we live. However, they don’t feel it is necessarily their job to inform these students; rather, they need to equip these students to inform themselves.

### *Internet safety*

While a minor concept only discussed by a two of the seven participants, the notion of Internet safety and cyber-security is an important role that these teachers feel should be address in the classroom. As such, it is important to note that some of the teachers interviewed believed that part of their role was to teach their students about safety, about the permanence of the Internet, and about their ‘digital footprint’ and the repercussions of putting certain things up on the Internet. Some responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant B: “I think you can NOT be too careful about [Internet safety]...one thing I’m realizing more and more is that what you put on the Internet is permanent in a way that nothing else is...a lot of these kids don’t understand the repercussions that something they thought was silly in middle school might come back to haunt them. People lose job prospects over Facebook posts.”

Participant H: “We need to teach them about their digital footprint, and how permanent that is. They need to learn how to be safe on the Internet.”

These comments were important to note. Amid the rush to get the latest technologies into classrooms in an effort to ensure students are keeping up with the fast-paced world, the idea of Internet safety and the digital footprint gets lost. The teachers who commented on this idea of preaching cyber-security were passionate about this role they play.

### *Parents’ role with the media*

RQ5 was intended to uncover the teachers’ perceptions of what the role of parents was regarding teaching their children about the media. Two major concepts – *monitoring and limiting consumption; co-viewing and sparking discussion* – were supported by the six of the seven

participants. Additionally, one minor concept – *cautioning against too much limiting of media exposure* – emerged from the interviews.

*Importance of monitoring and limiting media consumption*

Six of the seven teachers believed that parents bore the responsibility of monitoring what their kids were watching, and of ensuring they were being safe; often, in the opinions of many teachers, this meant limiting the amount of screen exposure. Some responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant B: “I do think parents need to reinforce [media literacy]...in fact, parents need to be where it starts. We only have them for a year. Especially with things like Internet safety, those are things parents need to be very aware of and stay ahead their kids.”

Participant C: “There’s such a plethora out there, it assaults the senses. I do know that all the studies have shown [parents] need to be careful with how much exposure kids have; [exposure] really breaks down their sensitivities. Parents need to limit how much TV they watch, and then provide alternate activities that stimulate and help them develop passions.”

Participant G: “My belief is parents need to be strong advocates, I guess role models, teachers of the different threats that can be out there. They need to be monitoring and watching and making sure that the kids are doing the types of things that, you know, those technologies are made for.”

As a result, it is evident that these teachers believe parents play an important role with regard to kids and the media. Essentially, limiting and monitoring consumption – a role only the parents can take on – is the first line of defense in the eyes of many of the teachers.

*Careful not to limit too much*

While only a minor idea supported by two teachers, it is important to note this emerging theme, as it cautions against the first theme surrounding the parents' role – the idea of limiting exposure. This is not to say these teachers were against limiting exposure; however, they cautioned against the overuse of such a tactic. The responses supporting this minor theme were as follows:

Participant B: “I don't think totally cutting out the screen is good, b/c then they're constantly seeking secretive ways to plug in...then the parents aren't seeing what they're watching.”

Participant E: “In some ways, if you're limiting exposure to certain media, those kids are missing out on certain conversations.”

While this view was only expressed by two of the participants, it was important to note, as it appears to contradict the notion that parents limit media exposure. However, on close inspection, these teachers are clearly not against limiting and monitoring media consumption; rather, they cautioned against too many restrictions, as it leaves students out of the conversations and could be counterproductive.

#### *Co-viewing and discussion*

Another major idea that emerged was the teachers' belief that parents need to be co-viewing various media with the children, and need to be using such media experiences to generate discussion. Some of the responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant D: “I think that parents should be watching news with kids, and having conversations about what it is they're hearing. I think they ought to be definitely exposing their kids to the fact that there are so many different perspectives. They need to talk to them about the process of why humans believe what they do.”

Participant E: “In my opinion, parents need to know what these kids are watching, and really they should be watching with them and talking.”

Participant F: “The parents should be sitting down with them, if they’re watching the news, explaining it or even picking up the newspaper with them and saying ‘these things are going on’. I think it’s the parents’ responsibility to ask the questions, to get the conversations going with the kids.”

Based on these remarks, it is interesting to note the emphasis these teachers placed on discussion. They clearly feel that, while it is important for parents to co-view the media with their children, it is of equal, if not more importance to then generate discussion based on these co-viewing experiences.

#### *The impact of SES on media literacy*

RQ6 aimed uncovering the role SES plays in media literacy, particularly regarding the motivation and ability to grasp media literacy concepts. SES has been a focus of many studies, specifically those studies of younger students and disparities that exist between those of higher and lower SES. Teachers in this study had different takes regarding “access” as well as technology’s ability to close the gap (or its propensity to further widen gaps). Several concepts, including those that point to positive trends (*lack of intimidation on the part of lower SES children; and the potential of technology to close the knowledge gap*), and those that point to negative trends (*less sophisticated usage by lower SES students; and lack of focus on the part of those students from lower SES*), emerged during this phase of the interviews.

#### *A distinct difference*

Regardless of their perception of the size of the disparity between those of lower and higher SES, or the implications thereof, each of the seven teachers pointed to some type of

difference between kids of lower and higher SES regarding the use of technology and media literacy skills. Some of the responses supporting this idea were as follows:

Participant C: “I absolutely see a difference between the poorer and more affluent kids.”

Participant B: “I see a huge difference in the technological skills of kids from lower SES than from higher SES...as far as their access, their exposure to the world, their understanding of the world and what’s going on in the world.”

Participant F: “It’s hard to put in words, but there is a difference from the kids of lower SES – I don’t think they have the reinforcement at home.”

It is evident from these comments that these teachers see a very clear difference – in the way of access, exposure, and understanding – between kids of different SES.

*Positive trend – lower SES kids are not intimidated*

Despite having fewer skills than their high SES counterparts, four of the seven teachers spoke to the fact that their students from lower SES backgrounds were still very motivated and excited by using technology, and were not intimidated when projects utilizing ICT came about.

Some responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant C: “I have this one student, she’s from lower SES and she’s a special needs kid, but (computers) don’t intimidate her...in fact she asks to go the computer lab; she begs to go every day.”

Participant B: “The kids of lower SES still have motivation to use technology and media...they get frustrated, but also have an amazing sense of pride when they work their way through some sort of problem that presents itself. I definitely notice their gains more so than someone starting out with more access, and a greater sense of personal investment in their projects and the fact that they can finish.”

Participant H: “I think the lower SES kids just want to play with technology in school more b/c they don’t get to play at home. But they like to use it, there’s no trepidation, there’s no lack of willingness to try, they’re excited.”

In light of these observations, these teachers were clearly surprised – pleasantly so – by the lack of intimidation on the part of their students from lower SES backgrounds. In fact, gains were often more evident with kids from lower SES, and personal achievement seemed greater among those kids.

*Positive trend – potentially closing the gap*

Four of the seven teachers spoke to the fact that technology, multimedia tools, and the Internet were helping to close the gap between their lower and higher SES kids. Additionally, these teachers spoke of being surprised by the ability of their lower SES kids to utilize and navigate these technologies, despite their seeming lack of in-home access. Some responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant B: “I think we can definitely help close the gap with having access to technology in schools.”

Participant D: “I am surprised at their (kids of lower SES) ability to maneuver around the assignments that involve technology; I think it’s because they’re born into it. Yes, there is a gap. But honestly, I was surprised that it wasn’t wider...the gap is surprisingly not as wide as I think it once was, before all of this technology.”

Participant H: “I can see when the adults are brought more on the same level – if they’re all technology-literate, every job is focused on it. I don’t know that technology and media completely bridge the gap in school, but it kind of helps.”

Through these remarks, these teachers clearly saw a potential for technology in schools to help close the knowledge gap between those of higher and lower SES. While the teachers still see a clear gap between the two groups, they also see it trending in a positive direction, and attribute that positive trend to technology in the schools.

*Negative trend – less sophisticated usage*

Three of the seven teachers spoke to the fact that their students from lower SES families tended to use computers and other ICT for less sophisticated and educational purposes than their higher SES counterparts, and spoke of widening gaps that were perhaps the result of such a phenomenon. Some responses supporting this theme were as follows:

Participant D: “They struggle more, in the actual how-to of certain technological things, compared to kids that have access and probably spend a lot of time on Facebook and lord knows what else. Relative to the more affluent kids, they definitely struggle and don’t use the technology the same way.”

Participant F: “The kids of lower SES, a lot of them have the technology, particularly the phone and iPod. But they’re not using them for educational stuff, not in the same way the other kids are; it’s more for the communication and the social and entertainment aspects.”

Participant G: “You can definitely notice the kids with the lower SES – they haven’t had the exposure that the others have had...they’re trying to play catch-up. If they haven’t had that exposure, when they were babies and toddlers and on up through elementary school, it makes a big impact of where they’re at in literacy, and impacts how they use these technologies – or don’t use them for that matter.”

These remarks reveal that these teachers believe students from lower SES are using technology more for fun and games, as opposed to more sophisticated, educational purposes.



Some attribute this to the fact that, when they get to this point in school, they are already so far behind. Others feel that, because they don't have access at home, they make up for the time they missed navigating social media and entertainment sites, sites that their more affluent counterparts get their fill of at home.

*Negative trend – intimidation and lack of focus*

While some of the teachers spoke of a positive trend whereby kids of lower SES were not intimidated by using technology, other teachers saw things differently. Three of the seven teachers discussed the notion that their lower SES kids were more fearful of projects related to technology, and that students often lacked focus when using ICT and were often overwhelmed by technology. Some responses supporting this negative trend were as follows:

Participant C: "I feel like we're going to get a wider and wider divide, as you have these kids without access at home just getting lost, and so far behind. You don't need to put on binoculars to see that. It's an economic thing more so than a minority thing. I think it's [about] resources, and it's also an attention thing. If you're embroiled in your own problems, you lack focus."

Participant E: "I believe there is a gap between those have's and have-not's. The kids that were not able to finish their project – there are definitely other issues – but I think it all feeds into the same thing. There's a difficulty in understanding certain aspect. They're afraid – some kids are afraid who haven't had a lot of experience using the technology, they're afraid to even begin b/c they don't want to mess anything up. The ones who haven't had the experience of messing something up and working through it, they're afraid to do anything."

Participant G: “[The lower SES kids] tend to... have lost motivation, and it’s hard to engage them. That’s why we’ll use the media a lot of times to pull them back in. After they’ve not had a lot of success, year after year, they build up that negative wall where they don’t want to take risks and don’t want to try. Extreme behavior issues often follow, to get ‘em, you know, out of that negative situation that they don’t want to handle or deal with.”

These teachers pointed to a lack of focus and a lack of motivation on the part of students from lower SES when working on media assignments. These teachers also conveyed a fear that, as a result of this lack of focus and motivation, technology will actually exacerbate extant knowledge gaps.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The results of this thesis uncovered several interesting and unique insights regarding media literacy education. Some positive developments were uncovered, while some troubling trends were also brought to light. It is important to elaborate these findings, relate them to the extant academic literature, and discuss how they confirm or refute what is presently stated in the academic literature. Furthermore, a purpose of this study is to contribute to theory building; therefore, this discussion will attempt to bridge the knowledge gap hypothesis and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) in an effort to better understand the interplay between media literacy, motivation, and knowledge gaps. This thesis will conclude with a discussion of the limitations included herein, and will recommend future streams of research for scholars aiming to build upon the existing academic literature surrounding media literacy education.

### *Defining Media Literacy*

To begin with, a clear definition of media literacy, something with which the academic literature has grappled for years, appeared to confound the educators interviewed for this thesis. A widely accepted definition of media literacy, as explicated by the Center for Media Literacy (2010), includes “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media in all of its forms.” However, only three of the teachers interviewed included all four of these components in their personal definitions of media literacy. The remaining teachers either had never heard of the term media literacy – a fact that was extremely surprising given the growth of the subject over the last 25 years (Kubey, 2003) – or had incomplete definitions of media literacy. The incomplete definitions appeared to define technological literacy as opposed to media literacy, and only included the access and production components of media literacy. This inconsistency appeared

to mirror that found in a similar study undertaken by Deal, et al (2010), in which several teachers misinterpreted the very meaning of media literacy, confusing it with technology utilization.

This seeming lack of clarity regarding media literacy is troubling. As Fuller, Damico and Rodgers (2004) asserted, “Despite the fact that 48 states currently have curriculum that contain one or more media education components, the United States falls well below other countries when it comes to the emphasis placed on media education in school-based curricula” (p 68). This is true despite the fact that the US is the biggest importer of media products in the entire world (Kubey, 2003). Considine (2001) pointed to the fact that, in other countries, the media literacy movement did not come from a centralized bureaucracy; rather, it began with independent teachers working at the classroom, grass roots level. However, the results of this study appear to point to the fact that a media literacy grass roots movement in the U.S. lacks sufficient traction. Yet another troubling trend relates to the Virginia Standards of Learning. *Standards of Learning*

Considine (2001) pointed to the importance of investigating media literacy on a state-by-state basis. Through examination of the Virginia SOL, this thesis revealed that most of the media literacy components appear in the subjects of language arts and English (The Virginia Department of Education, 2010); however, the academic literature points to the importance of incorporating media literacy education throughout the curriculum, across grades and subjects. The teachers interviewed for this thesis supported this notion, conveying the opinion that the pervasive nature of media in students’ lives suggests that media should be taught in all facets of the curriculum. As a result, the seeming lack of media literacy education benchmarks outside of English and language arts is quite disconcerting.

Equally concerning was the difficulty these particular teachers displayed in communicating media literacy benchmarks included within the Virginia SOL, with some of the teachers proclaiming that they were not familiar with any media-related standards. This is despite the fact that several media literacy benchmarks, specifically related to persuasion, media viewpoint, opinion, and source credibility are to be met during the grades these individuals teach. This appears to point to a potential disconnect between the SOL and the actual curriculum, at least as it pertains to media literacy in these specific teachers' classrooms.

### *The Paradox of SES*

Neuman and Celano (2006) noted that when kids of lower SES are given access to the Internet— through updated public library computer labs – they spend an equal amount of time on the Internet as their more affluent counterparts. However, the authors also noted that the kids of lower SES used that time for less sophisticated purposes. This was a sentiment echoed by several of the teachers interviewed for this thesis, who noted that, while those with in-home access were using computer time in school for educational purposes, kids without that access at home were using their Internet time for entertainment and social media purposes. This is an interesting quandary, as it speaks to the ability – or lack thereof – of technology to bridge knowledge and achievement gaps in society. The comments and viewpoints of the teachers interviewed represented a bit of a paradox surrounding SES and technology.

Several of the teachers spoke of technology's inherent ability to level the playing field, and spoke of being continually surprised by the technological abilities and achievements of their students of lower SES. These teachers believed that technology was definitely helping to close societal gaps. However, other teachers found students of lower SES to be so far behind with regard to technology use that they lacked focus and motivation; these particular teachers saw the

gaps widening as technology continues to advance. The latter stance is in line with Hindman (2000), who asserted that gaps were in fact widening, and the great utopia promised by universal access to technology might not be realistic. So why is it that some teachers see the gaps widening, while others see it closing?

To understand this, it is necessary to understand motivation, and the role it plays in media literacy. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) states that people learn by watching what others do and reproduce the actions of others when motivated to do so. So what is it about some teachers' methods that appear to motivate kids, regardless of SES, to higher achievement with media and technology skills? Interaction appears to play a clear role here. Those teachers that stressed interaction with media and technology, and the idea of getting up in front of the room to participate with such tools, were those that saw the greatest media literacy gains with their lower SES kids. Not surprisingly, these teachers were the same ones who pointed to a potential narrowing of knowledge and achievement gaps due to the presence of media and technology in school. Also not surprisingly, these were the same teachers who appeared to define media literacy consistently with the literature, and were able to articulate the media literacy components found in the Virginia SOL.

This is not to say that the teachers who pointed to widening gaps are less effective as educators, or less skilled at motivating and engaging their kids in general. However, when it comes to media literacy skills, those teachers with a clear understanding of the tenets of media literacy appeared to be those who relied on constant technological interaction in the classroom, and appeared to have the greatest results with regard to meeting media literacy benchmarks. While motivation, particularly as it pertains to knowledge gaps, is important to understand, it is also important to generate a deeper understanding of access.

### *Redefining Access*

Sourbati (2009) asserted that the concept of access, one of the main tenets of most definitions of media literacy, must be refined. Sourbati (2009) viewed media access as a social process. With analog technology, merely providing access to the technology (e.g. a telephone line) was enough to accomplish “access.” However, with today’s advanced communication technologies, that is not enough. As Sourbati (2009) asserted, “access to a computer and network connectivity by itself does not ensure meaningful access to the Internet” (249).

The very notion of access has clearly changed in recent years; this is a notion shared by many of the teachers interviewed for this thesis. In addition to knowing how to turn a computer on and navigate the Internet, students must learn to understand technological productivity and research tools, and must appreciate the importance of social, ethical, and human issues related to the technology. The teachers interviewed for this thesis, by and large, confirmed this notion. Many of the teachers discussed the importance of discerning opinion from fact, of questioning sources and seeking out multiple points of view, of understanding the ideology behind certain messages, and of fostering a desire to be informed citizens.

As such, it was clear that many of them understood the changing nature of access in the twenty-first century. Perhaps, then, it is important to revisit the widely accepted definition of media literacy, which includes access, analysis, evaluation, and production, to include an expanded explication of access. 21<sup>st</sup> century access must include, to some degree, a level of ability. Therefore, perhaps the definition of media literacy could include the ability to access information technologies and other media at a level equal to one’s peers, and the ability to produce media in all of its 21<sup>st</sup> century forms, including social media, blogs, and the like. While

ability, access and motivation are important to understand, of equal importance is gaining an understanding of the teachers' role and the parents' role regarding media literacy.

### *Whose Job is it Really?*

One extremely encouraging trend was the fact that these teachers, on a whole, took a great deal of ownership regarding the responsibility to teach students about the media. However, while each teacher saw their role in media education as important, they also each pointed to the importance of media education in the home. They discussed the need for parents to monitor their kids, and to truly know what it is they are consuming. They also discussed the need for parents to co-view with their kids, and generate discussion. In a sense, these teachers felt that, while they played an important role in media education, the buck truly started and stopped with the parents. This sentiment echoes that made by Chen, et al. (2002), who asserted that intervention strategies by parents might be the most powerful tools in teaching children about the media, and in reducing the harmful effects often associated with media consumption.

While the teachers believed co-viewing and discussion to fall under the auspice of the parents' job, most did not feel that this function was being adequately performed at home. This belief was based on a variety of factors, including the fact that many parents were working multiple jobs and unable to commit the appropriate amount of time to such endeavors. However, the lack of interpersonal socialization among parents and their kids was a cause for concern for many of the teachers, who truly felt this to be the first line of defense against the ills of over-saturation.

### *Conclusion and Contributions*

Through these in-depth conversations, this thesis filled a gap in the academic literature by obtaining the insights of teachers, a segment that is often over looked in this type of research.



While some troubling trends were uncovered, most notably regarding the definition of media literacy and the articulation of the statewide standards, the results of these interviews also revealed some encouraging trends. While the media literacy movement appears to have not gained sufficient traction, there does appear to be an undercurrent of social change, with media literacy making its way into the curriculum, slowly but surely. This a very encouraging trend, and one that should be monitored closely, through a variety of studies, to ensure that this movement does in fact gain the appropriate foothold; only then can the U.S. catch up with the rest the world, and the knowledge gap begin to reverse course.

The interview questions and probes, guided by the literature, then refined, piloted, and further refined, provide an excellent framework on which to build future qualitative studies of this nature. Further refinement could be necessary, as the demographics of the region under scrutiny change; however, the nature, scope, and comprehensiveness of these questions could act as an excellent jumping off point for such inquiry.

Finally, this study makes an important contribution to media literacy research through a coalescing of the theoretical frameworks of social cognitive theory and the knowledge gap hypothesis, and their interrelationship with media education. Through bridging these concepts, something not done before in the academic literature, this study provides an interesting combination of theoretical support on which to draw for future studies of this kind.

### *Limitations*

As is the case with any study, this thesis certainly contained limitations. For one, the participants utilized only represented two middle schools contained within the same county. Consequently, the students taught by these teachers perhaps did not represent an extremely diverse population; a similar study that covers a larger and more diverse population might

generate interesting insights. Additionally, only eight teachers were utilized for this study.

While an adequate number for a study of this nature, future studies could attempt to include more teachers in an effort to speak with a more diverse group of participants, in terms of experience, background, education, etc.

In any qualitative analysis, making generalizations from the results is tricky. While generalization of qualitative inquiry is not its intended purpose, this is clearly a limitation of this type of undertaking, as it only illuminates one piece of the puzzle.

The convenience sampling method utilized for this thesis also represents a limitation. Through this type of sampling, it is possible that only like-minded participants were secured, which could have impacted the data collected, and could have resulted in narrowly conceived results.

Finally, the inductive manner in which the data was analyzed presents a limitation to this study, as the emergent themes explicated in this study were the subjective interpretation of the primary investigator. While investigators attempt to step away from the data display objectivity, invariably the investigator's own biases, consciously or not, come into play.

### *Future Research*

As Gaziano (1997) suggested, future knowledge gap studies need to offer “more unified, integrated efforts to address this social problem [and] should include a broad array of perspectives” (p. 255). Future scholarship should attempt to further bridge media literacy and the knowledge gap, and should employ a variety of methodologies, including survey research, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, in an effort to tackle the issue from every conceivable angle.

Building upon this study, as Considine (2001) posited, each state's standards of learning should be examined to determine where media literacy benchmarks occur. Therefore, it would

be fruitful for scholars to undertake an examination, similar in scope to this thesis, of the other 49 states' standards of learning. This could uncover what benchmark are set forth by the state departments of education, during which grades these benchmarks are to be met, and within which subjects these benchmarks fall. Replicating this study, utilizing teachers that are responsible for media literacy standards, could bear interesting insights regarding student, teacher, resource, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students across the country, and across a variety of SES backgrounds.

While Social Cognitive Theory, a guiding theoretical framework for this study, could help to inform future research in the arena of media literacy, certainly other theories could help guide such inquiries. Livingstone and Helsper (2006) pointed to a disconnect between literacy and effects research, and offered a unique approach to studying advertising effects on children at a variety of age levels. In drawing upon the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the authors asserted that younger children's inability to discern advertising from programming resulted in their use of peripheral processing. Consequently, while effects and persuasion did occur, those effects tended to be more short term. Older children and teens, however, in possessing more sophisticated cognitive abilities, didn't necessarily ward off the effects of advertising. In fact, it's this higher level of sophistication that led these consumers to utilize central processing of advertisements, which had the ability to lead to stronger and more lasting effects. Therefore, utilization of ELM as a guiding theoretical framework in examinations of media literacy and knowledge gaps could prove quite fruitful.

Kubey (1998) noted that in smaller countries, media literacy "efforts were built from substantial grassroots organizing by teachers, often in close contact with administrators and academics" (p. 59). Goodman (2003) concurred with this assessment, noting that "American

efforts...tended to come less from the grassroots than from government and private agencies” (p. 14). Being that our country is so spread out, this has, according to Kubey (1998) led to further isolation of media educators in the US. Kubey (1998) pointed to the fact that the leading advocacy groups in the US – such as the Center for Media Literacy – exist “outside the education establishment” (p. 59). As such, future research could include examinations of such advocacy groups in an effort to examine the relationship between those groups, policymakers, school administrators, and teachers.

Collaborative efforts and interventions are also rife with potential. Wilksch, Tiggemann, and Wade (2006) collaborated with classroom teachers in order to “ensure that learning activities were age appropriate and likely to ensure maximum benefit to the students” (p. 387). Evans, et al (2006) also collaborated with classroom teachers in an effort to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables and, which resulted in better and more active participation amongst the students. Future research and intervention strategies need to incorporate such collaboration between students, teachers, and parents, in an effort to achieve maximum gains from media literacy intervention strategies.

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## APPENDIX 1

**Consent Information for Media Literacy Study  
(IRB 10-780)****VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE  
UNIVERSITY****Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects****Title of Project:**

Thesis – Media Literacy in the K-12 Classroom

**Investigators**

Charles J. O’Kane – Master’s Candidate, Virginia Tech Dept. of Communication  
Dr. John C. Tedesco – Faculty Advisor, Associate Professor, Virginia Tech Dept. of  
Communication

**I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

The purpose of this study is to investigate your assessment of the utility of media literacy in the classroom, how you implement it, your understanding of what the Virginia Standards of Learning stipulate regarding media literacy, and other related topics

**II. Procedures**

1. You will answer a series of questions related to media literacy, your teaching habits, Virginia SOL, and other related topics.
2. Interviews should take anywhere between 45 and 60 minutes to complete
3. Interviews will be audio-recorded, and later transcribed by the study investigators, to ensure accuracy of your answers
4. If you like, we will make available the results of our study with you through email contact information and share our thoughts on the findings of the study if you would like to find out about the results.

**III. Risks**

While we do not expect the risks to be beyond those that are normally experienced in day-to-day conversation, it is possible that the interview questions could bring to light that certain SOL benchmarks, as they pertain to Media Literacy, are not being satisfactorily met by your instructional method.

#### **IV. Benefits**

This study will uncover student, teacher, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students at various grade levels; uncover teachers' understanding of the SOL and the benchmarks for media literacy that are contained within those state directives; contribute to theoretical building efforts so that media literacy education is better understood in academic literature, in higher education, and in K-12 curriculum; make policy and curriculum recommendations regarding the inclusion of media literacy education in the K-12 curriculum, as well as within continuing education for teachers.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

We will make every effort to protect your privacy; We will not use your name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports.

#### **VI. Compensation**

Participation in this study is voluntary; no compensation, monetary or otherwise, will be given to participants.

#### **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You decide on your own whether or not you want to be in this study. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study, you have the right to stop being in the study at any time. While completing the interview, you may also skip any particular question you choose, for any reason.

#### **VIII. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

Answer a series of questions related to media literacy, your teaching habits, Virginia SOL, and other related topics.

We request you to kindly help us maintain study confidentiality by not talking about this study with your friends or colleagues until everyone has had a chance to participate in the study.

#### **IX. Subject's Permission**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

Date\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects)\

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

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## APPENDIX 2

**Interview Questions and Probes for Media Literacy Study****(IRB 10-780)**

## Demographic Data:

- Name
  - Date
  - School
  - Subject Taught
  - Grade level
  - Years of teaching
  - Education Level (BA, MA, PhD, Edd)
  - Interview location
  - Number of classes taught/students per class
  - How often these classes meet
- 
1. People define the concept in many different ways. How would you define “media literacy”? (Probe: where do media texts fit into today’s definition of literacy?) Has your perception of what Media Literacy means changed over the years?
  2. Have you had an opportunity to include lessons specific to media literacy in your classroom?
    - a. What types of things have you done? (Probe: amount of time, topic, grouping, resources)
    - b. Why did you choose to approach it in this manner? (Probe: linked to existing units/lessons, student interest)
    - c. How did you evaluate student learning? (Probe: does the VA SOL give any tips on how to evaluate/assess levels of media literacy)
    - d. How did your students respond? (Probe: what did they do and say?)
    - e. Do you have any examples of a specific student you could share?
  3. What do you think about bringing popular culture into the classroom? Do you think this can be helpful in engaging the students? Do you think it gets things off track? (Probe: do you think they have enough media exposure outside of school, and so class time is a time to get them back to “basics”?)
  4. How do you think that media literacy influences student learning? (Probe: positively and negatively; incorporation of popular culture)

5. From your point-of-view, what is it that motivates kids to learn, to be engaged? How does the introduction of media in the lessons facilitate or impede?
6. Do you perceive a difference between kids that are heavily involved in extracurriculars (vs those who are not) with regard to how they comprehend the media literacy aspects of your curriculum? Do kids of different SES grasp ML concepts differently?
7. Do you see your students' sense of identity being shaped by media? If yes, how? (Probe: fashion; interests; hopes; self-esteem, self-image; what is cool vs. un-cool; in vs. out; prized vs. marginalized)
8. What challenges do you face as you plan and implement your media literacy studies? (Probe: access to resources; support from administration; personal comfort level)  

Did you talk with your colleagues or administrators about media literacy? How did they respond? (Probe: their opinions of media literacy as it pertains to the VA SOL's; again support that you get from the administration)
9. What do you think is your role in educating children about media? (Probe: to protect them from harmful media; promote citizenship; view media as artform; further health/development; etc)
10. What do you think is the role of parents as it pertains to the media? (Probe: overlap and conflict as well as cases in which there may be parental neglect vis-à-vis media education; kids baby-sat by TV; latch-key kids)
11. Is there anything in this interview we haven't covered that you feel is important regarding media literacy?

## APPENDIX 3

**Debriefing Statement for Media Literacy Thesis  
(IRB 10-780)**

Thank you for participating in this study. In this study we are evaluating media literacy education as it pertains to the K-12 curriculum in the state of Virginia.

We are asking about 10-20 educators like you to take part in this study. All participants are taking part in the same way you are, through a semi-structured, one-on-one interview.

We expect that the findings of this study will help us uncover student, teacher, family, classroom, school, and other structural variables that influence media literacy among students and teachers at various grade levels.

We request you to kindly help us maintain experimental validity by not talking about this study with your friends or colleagues until everyone has had a chance to participate in the study.

Below are several links if you'd like to find out more information about media literacy education:

1. The Center for Media Literacy (CML): [www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)

The **Center for Media Literacy (CML)** is an educational organization that provides leadership, public education, professional development and educational resources nationally and internationally.

2. National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE): [www.name.net](http://www.name.net)

The **National Association for Media Literacy Education** is a national membership organization dedicated to media literacy as a basic life skill for the 21st century. The NAMLE vision is to help individuals of all ages develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens in today's world.

3. Coalition for Quality Children's Media (CQCM): [www.kidsfirst.org](http://www.kidsfirst.org)

A national not-for-profit organization, CQCM is a voluntary collaboration between the media industry, educators and child advocacy organizations that teaches children critical viewing skills and helps to increase the visibility and availability of quality children's media.

Once again, thank you for your participation. If you have any further questions, or would like to find out about results of this study, please feel free to contact the investigators of this study.

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Additional Contact: Dr. John Tedesco (Email: [tedesco@vt.edu](mailto:tedesco@vt.edu); Phone 540.231.3224).



## Appendix 4

**TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS**

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Subject/Grade</u>	<u>Years Experience</u>	<u>Education Level</u>	<u>Certification</u>
<b>A</b> (Pilot Interview; Not included in results)	Elementary School (grade 4)	2	MA in Teaching	VA Certified Elementary Education Teacher
<b>B</b>	English – 4 classes (grade 8) Theater Arts – 1 class (grades 7 & 8)	7 years	MA in Education	National Board Certified English Teacher
<b>C</b>	Language Arts (grade 7)	23 years	BA in English	VA Certified English Teacher (through grade 12)
<b>D</b>	Language Arts – 3 classes; Social Studies – 2 classes (grade 7)	20 years	BA in Poli Sci MA in Curriculum and Instruction	VA Certified English Teacher (through grade 12)
<b>E</b>	English (grade 8) Create Writing (grades 7 & 8)	10 years	MA in Curriculum and Development	VA Certified English Teacher (through grade 12)
<b>F</b>	English & Social Studies – 2 of each (grade 6)	13 years	BA in Education	VA Certified English Teacher (through grade 12)
<b>G</b>	Literacy Coach for 4 county middle schools (grades 6 – 8)	17 years	MA in Curriculum and Instruction	VA Certified Reading Specialist (through grade 12)
<b>H</b>	Language Arts (grade 6)	4 years	BA in Education; MA in Educational Leadership expected May ‘11	VA Certified L.A. teacher (through grade 12)