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# MEDIA LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES: A CLOSE LOOK AT TEXAS

by

AVA WARD-BARNES

Under the Direction of Mary Stuckey

## ABSTRACT

It is difficult to deny the ubiquitous nature of our mediated landscape in the United States. With the plethora of mediated messages come media related risks for children. Training in media literacy is one way to combat these risks. Unfortunately, most American public school media literacy standards are in need of improvement. This project examines how media literacy functions in American K-12 public schools. It not only applies a standard of assessment for media literacy standards, but also provides a synopsis of the range of advanced to poor programs across the country. Then, suggestions for improving lacking programs are revealed in a case study on Texas' advanced media literacy program.

**INDEX WORDS:** Media literacy, Program evaluation, Media education, Texas, "Viewing and Representing", United States media literacy

MEDIA LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES: A CLOSE LOOK AT TEXAS

by

AVA K. WARD-BARNES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

MEDIA LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES: A CLOSE LOOK AT TEXAS

by

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## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to deny the ubiquitous nature of our mediated landscape in the United States. Whether we are seeking entertainment, walking down the street, grocery shopping, or riding in a car, people living in the U.S. encounter mass media on a daily basis. But mass media messages are not the only form of mediated content on the rise in America. Personalized mediated messages in the form of cell phone text messages, computer-mediated instant messages, online social networking interactions, and blogs (among others) also crowd Americans' consciousness. These more personalized media devices add to the media's increasing ubiquity. In fact, avoiding mediated messages for a single day would be a notable feat requiring spatial and visual acrobatics. Among the Americans submerged in media messages are, of course, children, whose mediated experience will be the focus of this thesis.

With the plethora of mediated messages, children encounter risks. Media literacy training, a program of study designed to help students navigate the ubiquitous messages encountered in various forms of media, can help to combat these risks as well as teach children communication skills appropriate to a media driven world. But, American children do not always have equal access to quality media literacy education, as it is lacking in United States public education. Offering adequate media literacy training to students in public schools across America will help prepare them to navigate a media-centric culture. Providing information to both understand and improve public school media literacy programs in the U.S is the overarching purpose of this project. First, media literacy will be defined and justified. Then, an overview of the current state

of media literacy programs in the U.S. will be provided followed by a detailed example of an advanced program in Texas.

Several topics will be covered in this introductory chapter to form a foundation of information useful in understanding the case study that follows. What media literacy is, the inescapable nature of mass media messages, media related risks, current media literacy trends in the U.S., and why media literacy is needed in public schools will be addressed. These topics all serve to build the case that children in the United States would greatly benefit from learning media literacy. Chapter two addresses how media literacy programs can reduce the negative potential outcomes of media viewing. Chapter three covers the history of media literacy in the U.S. and provides a summary of current public school media literacy efforts across the country. The chapter also includes an outline of common challenges to public school media literacy programs. Chapter four contains the bulk of my research comprising in-depth interviews, a legislative review, and a general literature review to bring to light the case of Texas' media literacy program. Because Texas' media literacy standards are particularly advanced and combated common challenges while starting, it provides useful data for other states to consider when improving their own programs. The final chapter includes a discussion of the implications that surfaced throughout the project along with suggestions for future research. My hope is that this project as a whole will not only demonstrate that media literacy standards need improvement in American public schools, but will also provide information on how to improve American media literacy education. The next section will provide a thorough definition of media literacy useful in understanding the research that follows.

## Defining Media Literacy

One fundamental problem in the field of media literacy is agreeing on a definition. Depending on the end being advocated—technical prowess, personal expression, critical thinking, etc—the operational definition of “media literacy” varies. Renee Hobbs (1994) wrote that media education in the U.S. is “a child with a thousand names” (p. 459). Different terms are used to describe the same basic concept of media literacy. Although different people categorize and define the concept of media education using different terms, the most broadly accepted phrase is “media literacy” (Chen, 2007). The concept of media literacy will be described here in order to operationalize an important term used throughout the remainder of this project.

After surveying what many different researchers have speculated about media literacy’s meaning, one widely accepted definition emerged—media literacy is the ability to decode, access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Chen, 2007; Hobbs & Frost, 2001). As the media literacy movement adjusts to the information age, the traditional understanding of media literacy is morphing to include more formats. The term “media” can refer to the messages contained in a multitude of media including television, billboards, magazines, books, websites, blogs, radios, etc. and the content they contain. The term, “mass media” can be distinguished as those mediated messages that are accessible to the masses, which precludes some social networking and blog messages depending on privacy filters. Although these examples still constitute mediated messages and are addressed in most media literacy programs,

they are differentiated from “mass media messages” as their audience is comparatively much smaller.

The educational programs that operationalize media literacy’s definition vary. These variations of media literacy programs still fit under the overarching direction of media literacy outlined above, but their priorities differ somewhat resulting in various sub-groups found within the discipline. Some programs lean toward a “protectionist” outlook where students are encouraged to avoid television, the internet, and radio and to support “high culture” media like books and classical music (Kellner & Share, 2005). “Media arts education,” on the other hand, places an emphasis on using and understanding the various media for individual creative expression and technical development, while the “critical media literacy” movement focuses on social production and teaches students to think critically about racial and social norms taught in the media (Kellner & Share, 2005). The “media literacy” approach encompasses all of these emphases to some degree with a more general focus on reading, analyzing and decoding mediated texts in order to enhance critical thinking and all around literacy.

Even though there is disagreement about exactly how to define and operationalize the term media literacy, for the purposes of this project, all varying definitions and program descriptions ultimately pertain to the evaluation and creation of media messages (a concise way of summarizing media literacy’s meaning and purpose). With this understanding of media literacy’s definition, a basic conception of why media literacy skills are needed is helpful in building the case for media literacy standards in public schools.

## Why We Need Media Literacy

To demonstrate the usefulness of media literacy training, several topics will be covered— the inescapable nature of the media, media related risks for children, the need for media literacy education in public schools, and current media literacy trends in the U.S. First, the inescapable nature of the media will be addressed. Children's need for media literacy training is particularly high right now. As technology advances, their lives are becoming more and more intertwined with mediated messages (Piegeron, 2008). Mediated messages no longer come solely through traditional mass media like television, film, billboards, magazines, and books. The "mass media," where an original is created and then dispersed to the mass public, is not the only type of media influencing children. New media forms like social networking websites and blogs enable user-generated content that is not always disseminated on a mass scale (Hobbs, 2008). These new technological forms of media are adding to the media exposure children experience. Screens are everywhere. There are i-pods, video gaming consoles, cell phones, wireless internet, computer games, DVD players, and interactive toys. With these highly personalized developments come even more precise and individualized channels for media to teach children.

Along with the personalization and technological evolution occurring in media channels, the statistics on media usage among children are staggering. American children are significantly more likely to spend time engaged with screen media than books or physical play (Wartella & Robb, 2007). Almost all children in the United States have a television set in their home, half of them have three or more TVs in the home, and a third of them have a personal television in their bedroom (Lemish, 2008). Studies

of computer exposure show similar results. Approximately 75% of American children have a computer in their home (two-thirds with internet access), and about half of them have a video game console (Lemish, 2008). So not only are children faced with mass media messages when they are in public spaces, but they probably encounter most of their media exposure inside their homes.

Not only do mass media permeate the public and home lives of children, but forms of media (including advertisements and sponsorships) can also be found in their schools. In exchange for money, electronic equipment or additional buildings, many schools accept commercial sponsorships, and thus indirectly endorse the commercial messages allowed inside their walls (Carmichael, 2007). Some schools have reported having a “refreshment area” sponsored by Coca-Cola where students can link to free wireless access (Carmichael, 2007). Other schools simply put the sponsor’s vending machines and/or signage throughout the school. Another example is Channel One--a TV news broadcast that many American public schools show daily. The show includes ten minutes of news coverage interwoven with about two minutes of commercials. The companies buying the advertising spots can ask for little more than to put their message in front of captive student minds—minds that are comparatively open to new brands and still forming brand loyalties (Austin, Chen, Pinkleton, & Quintero Johnson, 2006). Even while at school, persuasive media messages can bombard America’s youth indirectly teaching them what to buy and how to live. Because American children will probably encounter mediated messages at home, in public, and while at school, it is important to analyze and understand the risks involved with exposure to mediated messages.

### *Media Structures and Risks for Children*

Because the media is loosely regulated and thoroughly inescapable, it is potentially harmful, especially in the case of children. While the media can provide some benefits to children like offering educational content on television or exposing them to diverse perspectives online, and while media literacy training can help children learn more about media benefits, one of the primary functions of media literacy training is to mitigate media related risks. The personalities and learning styles of children differ. As a result, they will interpret mediated messages differently. Some will be influenced negatively by a particular media text whereas others may not. Nevertheless, because many mediated messages are harmful for some if not most children, it is important to reduce these risks.

So, what makes the media risky? To begin with, mass media ownership trends are problematic. There are a few huge media conglomerates that produce and own the majority of mass media messages in the United States. In the early 1980s, there were approximately fifty elite media making corporations, and today that number has dwindled to about five. Time Warner, Comcast Corporation, Viacom and the Walt Disney Company are four of the largest mass media producers, each with a net media revenue totaling in the tens of billions (Campbell, Martin & Fabos, 2009). These companies generate most of America's newspapers, radio, television, movies, magazines, and books. For the most part, the messages these companies produce are designed to create profits, serve the shareholders and enhance the financial well being of the company (Campbell et al., 2009). Considering what is healthy for the consumer

(and children across America) is not a significant consideration unless it effects company profits.

Furthermore, because these companies generate large amounts of income in the U.S., they produce vast sums of tax revenue for the United States government. This causes some theorists to question whether government lead regulation boards are less likely to limit the content and exposure of potentially harmful messages because it might decrease company profits and the resulting tax income for the government (Campbell et al., 2009). The thinking goes, if those potentially harmful messages are profitable for the government, then the government decision makers are less motivated to stop or hinder those sources of income.

Lastly, freedom-of-expression laws limit the government's ability to regulate the mass media. Media companies have constitutional rights to create content that is offensive, misleading and/or a bad example for children. Most mass media content is created in the interest of profit generating, multi-billion dollar corporations, and is not very regulated by the government (Campbell et al., 2009). Therefore, the burden of filtering mass mediated messages and shielding children from potentially harmful content falls first on consumer citizens, not media conglomerates. In the case of children needing supervision, this becomes the burden of parents. Media literacy awareness and time available to monitor children differs from parent to parent; as a result, children may not have equal access to media literacy content. That is why media literacy is needed in public schools. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.



Media conglomerates are motivated by profit, and this profit comes primarily from advertisements—a large source of mediated messages. Advertisements generally exist for the end purpose of encouraging consumers to buy a product or service. Although this can be done honestly and ethically, often it is not (Flouri, 1999; Stromberg, 1990). Companies have been using questionable tactics to entice customers to buy for decades, and today advertising trends are moving toward increasingly covert and coercive means (Martin & Smith, 2008). For example, numerous advertisements today are created to go unnoticed by the consumer but still influence him or her on a less than conscious level (Bellinson, 2006; Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004; Sass, 2006). Jean Kilbourne (1999) argues that advertising is primarily effective when it convinces consumers to deceive themselves into thinking they are not influenced at all. Modern advertising has moved far beyond communicating product benefits. It is now a mode to trigger emotional and identity-related affects in consumer psyche, a tactic commonly used in “covert marketing” (Martin & Smith, 2008, p. 45).

Covert marketing has been defined as advertisements in which the advertiser is not “openly acknowledged or displayed” (Martin & Smith, 2008, p. 45). Brands are communicated in a subtle, sometimes completely unnoticeable fashion. The key element is thus the appearance of a non-marketing message, while still being persuasive and aiming to influence consumer decision making (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004). In this way, marketers can trick consumers into allowing the advertising message into their consciousness. By appearing as a non-ad, consumers are usually unaware and therefore less on-guard against the possibilities of manipulation. Examples of covert marketing include product placement and product integration, along with word-of-mouth

or “buzz” marketing, event sponsorship, and interactive games, among others. They come through both mass and personal media channels and are integrated into media sources ranging from movie plots to online social networks.

The exact growth of covert marketing is hard to quantify. Nevertheless, it is clear that the number of covert ads is rising. Recent marketing research shows a decline in traditional forms of advertising (i.e. billboards, television commercials, etc.), and a rise in novel marketing techniques including covert marketing (Sass, 2006). Most covert advertisements are created with the intent to influence on a less than conscious level. Many companies are using these tactics to advertise their products and services including Facebook, YouTube, Wal-Mart, HBO, and many others. In the midst of advertising messages designed to go unnoticed by potential buyers, viewers of media are more vulnerable to the messages they may encounter whether they be good or bad.

Some theorists believe that mass media consumers do not have to be passive and accepting; they can decrease their vulnerability by being dialectic and critical of advertising messages (Stern & An, 2009). In order to do this, they must be aware—aware first that the message they see is an advertisement, aware second of the motives behind it, and finally aware of the methods used to convey it. These steps of awareness are all commonly taught in media literacy courses (National Communication Association, 1998). With this information, audiences are less vulnerable to the highly persuasive messages contained in ads that may or may not be in their best interest (Stern & An, 2009). Because advertisements can (and are designed to) affect the way viewers think and what they buy, they represent both an attitudinal and behavioral risk for children.

Advertisements are not the only issue that can pose problems for children. Mass mediated messages have been linked to children's health and behavioral risks. Eating disorders and drug abuse are two consequences that have been linked to watching and accepting certain messages that may come through films, sit-coms, editorial copy and/or advertisements (Wilksch et al., 2006). These messages can cause a decrease in self-esteem among some children (Wilksch et al., 2006). Even in the five to eight-year-old age group, researchers found that after viewing women's magazines, young girls were more likely to report dissatisfaction with their bodies and a desire to diet. Additionally, when drug habits are modeled as cool or desirable in entertainment texts, children may be prone to imitate the behaviors modeled (Gass & Seiter, 2007).

Another risk was addressed by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, which published a piece titled, *Fateful Choices: Healthy Young for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1992). The piece outlined the need to protect students from strong media pressure to smoke, drink, have sex or eat unhealthy foods. In order for adolescents to develop in a healthy way, the Council encourages media literacy intervention. In addition to self esteem issues, unhealthy habits and drug use, many reports have confirmed the influence mass media have on acts of violence and aggression among children (Andison, 1977; Cantor, 2002; Centerwall, 1992; Paik & Cornstock, 1994; Peterson & Pfof, 1989). Even for those children who may not react by learning and practicing aggression, various entertainment and advertising pieces have been suggested to increase children's feelings of anxiety and fear along with contributing to antisocial behavior (Trend, 2007; Paik & Cornstock, 1994). The American Academy of Pediatrics, among many other health related organizations, has issued over eleven

policy statements pointing toward the various health risks that exist for children in exposure to mass media content. The academy urges family doctors to spread the word about preventative care in protecting children from harmful mass media messages (Rich & Bar-on, 2001). Children in particular are vulnerable to health and behavioral risks as a result of exposure to messages that promote violence as effective, thin or muscular bodies as ideal, promiscuity as normal and desirable, and drug use as acceptable. The mass media produces many behavioral risks for children that can be addressed with media literacy training.

Additionally, the mass media can be a harmful constitutive force in the developing outlooks of children. Entertainment media in particular disseminate political and social influences for children (Moritz, 2003). Sheng Kuan Chung (2007) writes, “media images and programs not only market products, ideas, values and worldviews, but also provide socially acceptable behavioral guidance for children” (p. 99). The Office of National Drug Control offered a similar warning citing mass media as possessing harmful imagery and ideology (as cited in Considine, 2002). Critical media theorists have illuminated the negative cyclical nature of the mass media. Myriam Torres and Maria Mercado (2006) wrote that “conglomerates and their allies work to keep and to expand their power by means of filtering information, manufacturing consent, and controlling what the public watch, listen to, read, think, believe, taste, dress, look like, speak, and how they perceive themselves” (p. 260). With all of this control over how people think and live, conglomerates are able to facilitate and encourage ideologies that promote their business and the consumption driven marketplace that supports their programming via advertisements. The constitutive power major media companies

posses is often used to influence consumer attitudes in favor of their own profit generating ends (Torres & Mercado, 2006).

Finally, the fields of cultural and feminist studies have shed light on the potential for social inequality and prejudices taught and disseminated through mass media (Kellner & Share, 2005). In a country haunted by a history of racism and sexism, among other issues, battling the stereotype representation cycle requires consistent critical thought and evaluation—a task not likely to be considered by profit driven mass media conglomerates (Gandy, 2008).

In a capitalist society that thrives on and praises the fiscal success of private companies, there is a tendency for those companies making the most money to have the most control over societal trends and even federal decisions (Stromberg, 1990). Companies will use this platform of power (over viewer consciousness in particular) to encourage their audiences to buy—to work hard and then pour their money into capitalist industries that will in turn fuel the profits of the conglomerates (Stromberg, 1990). Some theorists argue that this results in the dissemination of a consumeristic ideology in which individuals are lead to believe that happiness, success and even self-worth is measured by the acquisition of material assets (Flouri, 1999; Stromberg, 1990). In order to be happy, viewers are taught to buy more and better things. A route that may or may not actually lead to fulfillment, leaving viewers in a cycle of buying, being disappointed when the satisfaction from that purchase fades, and then seeking remedy by buying again.

In summary, the mass media presents a host of different issues including problematic ownership trends, ethically questionable and difficult to detect

advertisements, poor health and behavioral examples, and the potential dissemination of harmful social outlooks and prejudices. These issues represent both behavioral and attitudinal risks for children who encounter the media. Not only does media literacy training help to combat these risks, but it also provides benefits like teaching technical production and creative expression skills. In light of these issues, media literacy programs can be seen as helpful and necessary. The next sections will address the media literacy environment in the United States starting with why media literacy is needed in American public schools.

### *Media Literacy Training Needed in Public Schools*

Developmental research tells us that children learn most of what they know of morals, social norms and ideals from three portals: parents, school and media (Croteau & Hoynes, 1997; Summers, 2005). Parental instruction usually has the advantage of positive and/or focused motives for a child's welfare. Likewise, information given in schools is crafted using guidelines made specifically for children. Information from the mass media and new technologies, on the other hand, operate under the freedom of broad boundaries and flexible guidelines (Campbell, Martin & Fabos, 2009). This information can be difficult to control or even monitor. For example, ratings are used to regulate entertainment texts. In some cases, if a movie or television show contains potentially harmful content, the rating will warn viewers. Parental controls on televisions are another optional feature that were developed to help parents monitor what their children watch, but this monitoring does not work when the child leaves the home to visit a friend, etc. Rating notifications usually appear in abbreviated form on DVD covers, or during an introduction to a show or movie. Whether a child knows what "R" or

“PG-13” means, or whether he or she happens to be removed from exposure to the “restricted” content is unpredictable. Actually keeping restricted content away from children requires strict monitoring that may or may not be present, which brings us to a different possible solution--media literacy administered in public schools.

The general protocol to protect children from restricted content is to let parents filter what they watch (based on ratings) and/or to participate in co-viewing with them in order to talk through and interpret mature and/or potentially harmful messages (Cricher, 2008). Internet content is difficult to monitor as new software is regularly developed that can avoid the boundaries made to filter content for children. Even the content filters do not usually come pre-programmed on computers; they must be bought and installed by parents. Again, the burden for media safeguards is placed on parents—a route that is not balanced or fair for all children. The question arises: is the goal to respect a parent’s ability to raise and educate his or her own child the way she thinks best, or should the state decide and provide education standards to American children? The answer is not one or the other but rather a collaboration of both. Some parents may have the option of enlisting their children in private school or educating them from home using relatively flexible curriculum guidelines. Those guidelines are in turn influenced by parents across the country who have the opportunity to vote state standard decision makers into office and often have the opportunity to voice their concerns in legislative meetings or to the decision makers themselves. The same is true for public school education standards—parents have the opportunity to influence them. Public school education standards provide children with a free (aside from state and federal taxes) opportunity to access

the agreed upon educational material. This way, American children have equal opportunity to attain quality educational content.

Chas Critcher (2008) writes, “Unfortunately, many, if not most, parents lack the knowledge, will or capacity to censor or monitor their children’s use of the media” (p. 102). Expecting every parent to monitor media usage and /or give their child media literacy training is not realistic. Some parents simply don’t have the time to monitor their children’s media intake, and many parents lack knowledge of media literacy. In fact some parents are not even literate, much less media literate. All parents are not adequate teachers of media literacy skills. Teaching media literacy in public schools will make this media buffer more evenly dispersed. Even with responsible and generally present parents, are we to assume that they will be with their children during all or most of their media exposure? This is a doubtful proposition considering the increasing ubiquity of the American mediated landscape. Therefore, media literacy training is helpful in navigating the potential risks children encounter in the media.

The fairest administration of media literacy education is through public schooling. Renee Hobbs (2007) writes that even though children benefit from a holistic approach to learning media literacy from parents, teachers, and fellow students, that does not change the fact that they need institutional structures to provide a thorough and trained approach to the discipline. Teachers can and do impact the challenges children encounter in the current digital media environment.

Numerous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of media literacy programs administered in schools (Austin & Johnson, 1997; Hobbs & Frost, 2001; Scharrer, 2002; Singer, Zuckerman, & Singer, 1980; Wade, Davidson, & O’Dea, 2003; Wilksch,



Tiggemann, & Wade, 2006). Offering media literacy training in public schools (and not just leaving this important information as a parent's responsibility to teach) enables all publically educated students an equal chance to develop strong critical thinking skills and expressive ability that will help them navigate the challenges presented in the American digital culture (Hobbs, 2007).

This is not to say that parents are not helpful in the process of teaching a child media literacy. Some media literacy programs support curricula that involve parents. The Texas "Viewing and Representing" standards encouraged parent interaction through various take home projects. In these assignments, parents were given material to read with their children instructing them on how to mutually participate in activities like, "Spot the Target Audience," "Use the Mute" and "Watch While They Surf" (Hobbs, 2002). These activities not only served to deepen a child's understanding of critical television viewing, but also taught parents how to participate in co-viewing with their children. Because many parents may lack media literacy skills, these take home activities with training materials can be helpful in teaching parents the valuable information, along with drawing their attention to the media their children encounter. In summary, media literacy taught in public schools can involve parents and is a fair and thorough dissemination of the training.

### *Media Literacy in the United States*

As a result of the risks media pose and the benefits media literacy can bring to students, many English speaking counties (including Great Britain, Australia, and Canada) have created media education programs administered throughout public K-12 curricula. Interestingly, although the United States is the world's leading exporter and

consumer of media products, it is behind other English speaking countries in terms of media literacy education for its own citizens (Chen, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2005; Kubey, 1998, 2003). As a result, many American students are left unprepared for the plethora of messages they receive daily from the media.

The lack of media literacy standards in the U.S. can be attributed to several factors including the sheer geographic size of the U.S. and its many state and local legislative bodies. Not only are the fifty states spread over thousands of miles, but political governance is split state by state and district by district. Instituting national curricular mandates is difficult because each state has its own Board of Education with jurisdiction over what education standard changes are made for its particular residents (Kubey, 2003). Other English speaking countries with national media literacy standards often have national curricular mandates the U.S. lacks (more details on the challenges to instituting media literacy in the United States will be given in a later chapter). The key to instituting adequate media literacy standards nationally is to encourage each individual state to adopt them. It should be noted that standards are different than actual curriculum and educational outcomes. State education standards set the requirements for what curriculum in each school must teach, so they are a starting point to instituting media literacy nationwide. Suggesting and instituting standard changes is not an easy task. That is why Texas' media literacy program is significant.

The initial program, Viewing and Representing, was instituted statewide and introduced an aggressive plan to incorporate media literacy training in public school English language arts classes throughout grades four through twelve. The Texas Education Agency publication that details the program, *Essential Knowledge and Skills*

*for English, Language Arts and Reading* (2000), has been referenced as the most significant state document to address media literacy (Considine, 2002). The Viewing and Representing program guidelines featured valuable media literacy objectives including:

- Investigation of the source of media representation or production, such as who made it and why it was made.

- Recognition of how visual, sound and design techniques convey messages in media such as special effects, editing, camera angles, reaction shots, sequencing and music.

- Recognition of genres such as nightly news, news magazine and documentaries, and identification of the unique properties of each.

- Examination of the effect of media on constructing student perception of reality.  
(Texas Educational Agency, 2000, pp. 14-15)

These objectives are in line with the National Communication Association's (NCA) five national competency statements (standards) for media literacy in the United States (National Communication Association, 1998). Students learn important analytical, critical thinking, and source critiquing skills that help them navigate their digitized and media saturated culture. Although the Viewing and Representing program was changed in 2008, the same guidelines are taught today just more in-depth and in earlier grades.

While these are just the general media program guidelines, they are expounded upon and taught in depth in Texas' public schools. It should be noted that the program

evaluation conducted in this project pertains only to the quality of programs as reflected by their state education standards. Standards are different from actual curriculum administered in schools. Education standards are simply the model and outcome goals of curriculum. Public school curriculum is revised and created based on the state standards. Because curriculum plans vary from school to school, the easiest way to evaluate a state's incorporation of media literacy is to look at their standards for public school education. Even though individual school districts and schools will create curriculum and implement the standards differently, they are required by law to adhere the curriculum to their state's standards (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010). Therefore, assessing the standards for states is an indication of the amount and quality of media literacy training public school students in that state will receive.

As the second largest state in the U.S., Texas' choices for education standards are often considered by other states. Texas, Florida and California combined educate approximately 50% of the children in the United States, so the fact that Texas' public schools teach media literacy means that more American students are getting the training (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). In addition, textbooks are often based on the education standard decisions of the largest states (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). If media literacy content is included in a textbook whether in Texas or not, the teachers that use that book may be more inclined to teach the material. Thus, when an influential state such as Texas changes its standards to include media literacy standards, it can impact the country as a whole.

Although Texas is not the only state instituting media literacy standards in their public schools, their program (according to their standards) is still one of the most

advanced and aggressive efforts in the country and should be studied for that reason. The media literacy standards in Texas have faced challenges. Texas was one of the first states to incorporate media literacy standards. As such, convincing the State Board of Education to include subject matter not considered by most other states was not easy. Texas' media literacy story is useful in providing an example for other states to follow in overcoming challenges and improving their own media literacy programs. Little is known about Texas' media literacy program, and no scholarly research has been published detailing its complete story. After several chapters providing background information for understanding the program, I will present the bulk of my research by telling the story of Texas' media literacy program from its inception to its change ten years later. The next section covers the methodology that will be used to develop this case study.

### Data and Method

The majority of my research pools information on Texas' media literacy program—more specifically, how it got started, what it involved, and how it was changed in 2008. A combination of methods was used to gather the data, comprising two different phases of research. Phase one included a legislative review along with a general literature review. The legislative review is distinguished from the general literature review, because it includes legislative sources only (audio recordings of Texas State Board of Education meetings, meeting minutes, and official standard documents). The literature review, on the other hand, includes only published texts that refer to the program such as newspaper articles and book chapters. Phase two employed interviews; several

experts who are knowledgeable about Texas' media literacy program were contacted and interviewed.

Phase one of data collection included background information about the case obtained from several sources. First, primary sources were analyzed in the legislative review beginning with the Texas State Board of Education meeting minutes in order to find which meetings addressed English Language Arts and Reading (ELA/R) standard changes. Then, each meeting containing potentially relevant information was listened to via the State Board of Education's audio archives, which include (for public listening) the complete audio record of every meeting held since the year 2004. Although information regarding the change to Viewing and Representing's standards was addressed in these meetings, how it got started was not, because the program's inception in 1998 precedes the starting date of the audio archives. The archives of meeting minutes and agendas were also reviewed. Then, the specific education standard documents for kindergarten through twelfth grade were compared based on the changes that occurred in 2008. All changes were reported and analyzed.

In order to obtain additional information helpful in contextualizing Texas' media literacy program, a general review of published literature was conducted. All relevant key words (Texas education policy, media literacy, media education, viewing and representing, etc.) that pertained to Texas' media literacy program were searched through Lexus-Nexus and EBSCOHost. Even though few results were found, all relevant texts were read in order to obtain an exhaustive amount of relatively unbiased information on the case. Notes were taken while these sources were reviewed, and the information gathered was relayed in the case study.

To fill in the gaps present in the first phase of research, several semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. The list of interviewees included members of the following expert groups: professors, Texas Education Agency workers, and third party officials who were involved in the Viewing and Representing case. This expert sample was chosen based on the level of involvement each individual had with the project, and the public listing of his or her contact information. The list of participants was limited because only particular data were needed from specific experts. Opinions of those marginally involved (Texas public school teachers, etc.) were not pertinent to revealing the facts of the case.

A total of six of the twelve experts contacted agreed to be interviewed. Three of these experts allowed their names and titles to be used. They include Sarah Crippen, the Director of English Language Arts and Reading Curriculum at the Texas Education Agency, Dr. Renee Hobbs, a prolific media literacy author who created part of Texas' media literacy implementation plan, and Deborah Leveranz, the Director of the Southwest Alternate Media Project (SWAMP), a non-profit media group who worked with teachers on the original media literacy proposal committee. Taken together, the experts provided a variety of sources knowledgeable on how the program was started, what it entailed, its effectiveness, and why it was changed.

Participants were interviewed by either phone or e-mail based upon which system of contact they preferred. My initial contact was via e-mail and referenced the nature of my research, its non-profit, student generated nature, my advisor, Mary Stuckey, and my mentor, Renee Hobbs in an effort to motivate response (recruitment e-mail can be found in Appendix C). Participants were given the opportunity to respond by

e-mail or phone. If some of the participants did not (at first) respond, I attempted to contact them over the phone. Such persistent measures were used because the individuals in this sample were highly knowledgeable about the case. Each voice had the potential to make a contribution to the overall story. As a result, I obtained a total of six in-depth interviews.

Interviews were semi-structured based on the questions contained in Appendix A. Semi-structured interviews were used so that in-depth follow-up questions could be asked. The nature of the questions changed based on the type of involvement the experts had with the case. Experts were asked any combination of the questions listed in Appendix A. Interview questions sought to reveal information on the extent of the expert's involvement with the program, its inception—how it was created, what convinced policy makers to include it, how the program was assessed and whether it was successful according to those assessments, followed by how and why Viewing and Representing was changed.

Notes were taken during phone interviews, and emailed responses were printed. The information from the interviews was analyzed paying close attention to patterns within the data. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) method of constant comparison was utilized to uncover and categorize thematic categories within the data. This method required me to create preliminary categories after reading through all data, and then to repeatedly reread the data to determine how to support and/or edit the preliminary categories. Special attention was paid to both consistency and difference within the interview data. Any outlying opinions found in the data were addressed. In addition, interview responses were compared to the first phase of research data collected along



with other participant responses. Combined with the information obtained from the first phase of research, the story of Texas' Viewing and Representing program is conveyed including its inception, its features, and its change. But before Texas' story is told, the fact that media literacy training is effective and needs improvement in the United States will be demonstrated.

As a result of media related risks for American children, media literacy training is needed in the United States. It is most useful and evenly dispersed when administered in K-12 public schools. The next chapters will suggest that media literacy training is not only effective in combating these risks, but also lacking in the United States. Then, using a legislative review, a general literature review and expert interviews, a case study on one of the country's most advanced media literacy programs will be presented in order to provide insight for other states to use in improving their own media literacy programs.

## CHAPTER 2.

### HOW MEDIA LITERACY MEASURES UP: NCA'S ASSESSMENT MEASURE FOR INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIA LITERACY AS A WHOLE

Media related behavioral and attitudinal risks are bombarding children in our media saturated culture. Fortunately, the practice of media literacy can help reduce these risks and provide additional benefits to children. On a basic level, media literacy is the ability to decode, access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Chen, 2007; Hobbs & Frost, 2001; Singer, Zuckerman, & Singer, 1998). When media literacy training is offered in American public schools, many children receive this instruction and therefore the benefits. But how can we know for sure that media literacy training is effective in combating media related risks for children? Although surety may not be possible, there is a host of research that points toward the effectiveness of media literacy training. This chapter serves to do two things that support my claims about the usefulness of media literacy training in addressing risks to children: (1) it outlines a standard of measurement to use in assessing the adequacy of complete media literacy programs in K-12 education, and (2) it demonstrates that media literacy lessons can reduce media related risks for young people.

Media literacy content has been tested in numerous experiments. But these tests typically examine specific lessons taught in media literacy instead of looking at media literacy programs as a whole. K-12 media literacy programs can be relatively large and

span numerous grades and subjects. They can involve multidimensional material covering a range of topics relevant to understanding all of the facets of media and the risks involved (Goulden, 1998; Kubey & Baker, 1999). The first purpose of this chapter is to reference a standard of measure to use when assessing the adequacy of complete media literacy programs—programs made up of numerous smaller lessons like those tested in the research. Some programs may incorporate individual media literacy lessons, but may not give students a comprehensive, complete media education designed to combat all of the media related risks and provide benefits. In order to assess what a complete and adequate media literacy program is, the National Communication Association's (NCA) competency statements for media literacy programs are outlined. These assessment criteria will be used throughout the remainder of the project to assess various media literacy programs across the country. When looking at state programs, the amount and quality of media literacy training is assessed based on NCA's standards alone, (the actual outcomes of the standards for education are not a part of the evaluation). Then, section two outlines media literacy effectiveness research in order to demonstrate that media literacy training can mitigate media related risks to children.

### Assessment Criteria for Complete Media Literacy Programs

Before assessing various individual media literacy interventions, the standards for a comprehensive media literacy program will be outlined. Media literacy programs (in this project's use of term) refer to the standards that guide what is taught to public school students. Although several expert groups have contributed suggestions for the evaluation of media literacy education, many media literacy scholars agree that the

National Communication Association (NCA) has posted the most comprehensive and applicable national media literacy guidelines for K-12 education (Berko, Morreale, Cooper, & Perry, 1998; Chen, 2007, Considine, 2002; Goulden, 1998; Scharrer, 2002). The Association gives detailed descriptions of their five competency statements for media literate students with a K-12 education. In other words, they outline what a media literate student should know. The connection to state education standards is easy to make, because state education standards outline what should be taught and the NCA standards outline what should be learned. Therefore, each of the NCA criteria is easily converted and compared to educational standards as both relate to the learning outcomes for media literacy training. Throughout this project, that connection is applied, and the NCA criteria (or standards themselves) are used to evaluate state media literacy programs.

When taken together, the NCA criteria give the framework for a complete and adequate media literacy program, and provide a unit of measure that can be applied to various different media literacy programs. Because each state's Board of Education is ultimately responsible for producing the media literacy standards, state programs can vary greatly. There is not a national mandate for American public school curriculum; education standard decisions are left to State Boards to decide. Using a standard of measure created by a third party research group (NCA) is useful in comparing and evaluating these diverse programs. The extent to which a program adheres to the five criteria-- whether it meets all or some--indicates its level of adequacy. Many states across America incorporate some but not all of NCA's standards leaving some material absent.

When producing the criteria, NCA contended that they engaged in “ample and careful deliberation” (National Communication Association, 2010, p. 1). NCA leaders, along with the Standards Committee (formed to write the standards) reached a consensus on the supporting research fueling the standards and the standards themselves. The Standards Committee was comprised of leading media literacy researchers and lead by Roy Berko and Carolyn Perry (Berko, et. al, 1998). NCA members were also able to give input on the standards (National Communication Association, 2010). When the standards were first released, the general public was alerted to their existence. They were reported in *USA Today*, *Education Week*, *Newsday* and by the Associated Press among others. NCA members were also charged to spread the word about the competency statements in their own regions and states (Berko et. al, 1998). In summary, NCA’s standards are a reasonable source for the evaluation of media literacy programs across the country for several reasons: (1) leading media literacy and communication scholars produced them using careful and rigorous procedures, (2) the criteria were widely circulated, and (3) the National Communication Association holds expert authority and is respected by many communication scholars.

Here are the five general competency statements (a.k.a. standards or criteria) published by NCA. They address what K-12 public school standards should ultimately encourage students to achieve. State media literacy standards that fully address and seek to accomplish these skills are considered adequate.

- I. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives.

II. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the complex relationships among audiences and media content.

III. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts.

IV. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the commercial nature of media.

V. Media literate communicators demonstrate ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences. (National Communication Association, 1998).

More details on each statement can be found in the chart located in Appendix B. The boxes in the chart expound on three aspects of each statement when it is applied: knowledge to be learned, behaviors to be assessed, and attitudes students should have. State standards can be thought of as competency statements about what students should learn from the media literacy curriculum administered in their schools. Therefore, these statements comprise the five standards for having a complete and adequate media literacy program.

The NCA standards composite both cognitive and behavioral outcomes. On the cognitive side, they address interpreting media messages and developing critical thinking skills, and on the behavioral side they address acquiring technical skills and creative expression (e.g. creating web sites, blogs, videos and more) (Scharrer, 2002). The standards challenge students to analyze and understand the relationships between a person's life and the media they encounter along with the relationships between

media industries, content, and audiences (Christ, 2004). All in all, NCA's standards offer a holistic and balanced pattern to follow in creating and/or assessing complete programs.

A program may focus heavily on standard number five, and do an excellent job of teaching students to use media to effectively and skillfully communicate, but may not address social issues that arise in mediated content (standard three). In this case, students are left with an inadequate amount of media literacy training. Even though they may have mastered how to use media to communicate, they were not taught critical thinking about social and cultural issues in the media. As a result, they do not have complete and adequate training. The Texas media literacy program is an example of an adequate program, because its state standards adhere to all five of NCA's competency statements. In comparison with other states, Texas is an excellent model to follow, because the state's media literacy program is particularly advanced.

Now that these standards have been presented, they will be used throughout the remainder of this project—particularly in the effectiveness research that follows. The next section will put these standards to the test and present evidence that media literacy interventions can help mitigate media related risks for children.

### The Effectiveness of Media Literacy Training

There are some differing opinions about how exactly to measure the effectiveness of media literacy programs. Some experts support evaluation and standardized testing to measure the progress of media literacy learning, while others mention the fact that developing media literacy skills involves critical reflection that cannot always be easily measured in a standardized format (Considine, 2002). Because

there is not a single perfect way to measure a student's absorption of media literacy material, it is important to obtain a variety of testing procedures and results. The discussion of studies that follows merge different types of testing (both standardized and critical reflection based) and feature interventions that cover all five of the NCA standards. Thus, a balanced overview of media literacy effects research is provided in order to support the claim that media literacy training can be effective in combating media related risks and teaching media related skills.

Training in media literacy is proposed as a potential aid for media related risks. Plenty of media literacy programs address these risks, but how do we know they are effective? In order to present evidence that media literacy treatment can mitigate risks and provide benefits to children, the majority of the research in this chapter is organized based on behavioral and attitudinal risks for young people who encounter mediated messages. But media literacy training does more than combat risks, it brings additional benefits. There is one benefit in particular that is not addressed in the confrontation of the above mentioned risks—that of technical and creative production skills, which will also be evaluated for effective reception.

Each media related risk is addressed in regard to the media literacy content that can help reduce it. Because the effectiveness research varies in ages tested, interventions used, results gained, etc., several relevant aspects of the most pertinent research projects will be conveyed. A description of the media literacy intervention tested will be provided in order to assess the methods used. The approximate age of participants as well as the longevity of the program will be given in order to convey what specific age groups and length of lessons the interventions were tested on. Ultimately



this will provide the overall age range and lesson lengths tested across the projects. The number of participants in each study will be provided. And, of course the results will be given to show how exactly that particular intervention was or was not effective. It should be noted that the effectiveness research on media literacy interventions is relatively controversial. While much research supports media literacy's effectiveness, some raises questions. Both sides will be addressed in the paragraphs that follow. First, behavioral risk interventions will be reviewed followed by attitudinal risk interventions, and interventions that teach technical production skills. While these categories can overlap, their basic structure is a useful tool in organizing the data.

#### *The Effectiveness of Media Literacy Training in Combating Behavioral Risks*

Behavioral risks of the mass media have been combated via media literacy interventions. Negative behaviors portrayed in the media such as disordered eating, alcohol abuse, promiscuity, and violence can be perceived as desirable by young people (Austin & Johnson, 1997). Much research has been done involving the issue of disordered eating and low self esteem among children. Many young people (especially females) compare themselves to the unhealthy sizes often featured in advertisements and entertainment media. This can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and depression, which can lead to behavioral issues like extreme dieting and even eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia (Lumb, 2007; Wilksch & Wade, 2009). In a sample of 540 eighth grade boys and girls and a thirty month time span, Wilksch and Wade (2009) tested an eight lesson media literacy intervention. The program was designed to combat desire to diet, depression and high shape/weight concern. The results suggested that even an eight session media literacy intervention aimed at addressing these issues is

effective in reducing feelings like shape and weight concern and depression thereby decreasing the likelihood of disordered eating and extreme dieting in a long term, multi-sex context (Wilksch & Wade, 2009).

Alcohol abuse (underage drinking, and/or drinking too much) is another behavioral risk that can be increased by mass media exposure. Research has demonstrated that mass media content is an important referent in a child's decision making process, and media literacy interventions may help children resist harmful behaviors in real life (Gass & Seiter, 2007; Wilksch et al., 2006). In an experiment performed by Austin and Johnson (1997), a media literacy intervention focusing on understanding persuasive intent and lowering the perception of realism in the mass media was suggested to be effective. Students' recognition of persuasion and proper perception of reality increased after the intervention. Those who received the media literacy intervention had significantly less acceptance of alcohol "norms" portrayed in the mass media as well as a reduced desire to imitate what they saw when compared to the control group who did not receive the intervention. Training in media literacy was again shown to mitigate media related risks for young people.

Promiscuous behavior and problematic sexual outlooks (e.g., unprotected sex, unrealistic expectations, etc.) can also be portrayed in the mass media. The United States has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the Western hemisphere, and research indicates that the mass media are an important source of sexual information for young people (Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, Chen, & Fitzgerald, 2008). Some scholars speculate that there is a connection between these two facts (Pinkleton et al., 2008). Media literacy interventions have been suggested to improve this situation. In an

experiment with 532 middle school students, a media literacy program comprised of fifteen lessons focused on educating students on potentially problematic sexual portrayals in the media. Children who had the media literacy intervention were less likely to overestimate sexual activity among other teens, more likely to consider delaying sexual activity, less likely to expect social benefits from sex, more privy to sexual myths, and favored mediated sexual imagery less. Overall, the media literacy intervention was suggested to positively influence children's decision making process involving sexual activity.

The last major behavioral risk influenced by the mass media is violent or aggressive behavior. The mass media can portray violence as common, effective in producing positive outcomes, and desirable (Trend, 2007). While the effects of violence viewed in the media can be hard to measure, some researchers have reported a positive relationship between violence viewing and increased interpersonal aggression and anxiety (Cantor, 2002; Centerwall, 1992; Cornstock, 1981). On the other hand, researchers have also suggested that violent portrayals in the media may not cause aggressive behavior in viewers, but may have other negative effects such as increased feelings of anxiety and fear (Paik & Cornstock, 1994; Singer, Slovak, Frierson, & York, 1998; Trend, 2007).

There are many experiments pointing to the outcome of violence viewed in the mass media, following is an example of one that reflects the general consensus in the field. In a two year longitudinal study, the correlation between media viewing and aggression was put to the test. A total of 169 elementary school students were chosen based on their high exposure to media violence and studied. They were given two sets

of training, one involving three lessons, the other two. The first training program was interactive and taught participants not to imitate television violence. Participants were instructed to make arguments about the potentially negative aspects of mass media violence. The second intervention required participants to help make a film teaching other children about the harmful effects of violence portrayed in the mass media. The second intervention of creating the film was the most effective. The results show that even though short term media literacy training has some effect, long term, and interactive intervention can be more effective. After the final intervention, participants viewed violence and aggression in the media negatively and reportedly did not want to imitate it. The intervention also significantly lowered the children's propensity to behave aggressively. Participants in the control group (not receiving the intervention) were more likely to desire to imitate the violence they viewed (Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, & Fischer, 1983). While some researchers disagree about the direct causal effect media violence has on young viewers (it may not cause them to actually imitate what they see), it is generally agreed upon that mass media violence has other negative effects such as increasing anxiety and fear and increasing the reported desire to act aggressively (Cornstock, 1981; Huesmann et al., 1983; Trend, 2007). Media literacy education is a tool that can help minimize these risks.

In summary, whether long term or short, interactive or not, media literacy training can reduce negative behavioral risks resulting from mass media exposure. Self-esteem and disordered eating patterns have been suggested to improve after media literacy interventions. Alcohol abuse has been reduced and promiscuous activity has been combated by exposure to the material. Children have reportedly been less likely to

overestimate sexual activity among their peers and more likely to consider delaying sexual activity. In addition, training in media literacy has been suggested to reduce children's desire and likelihood to imitate aggressive behavior viewed in the media. Media literacy education is an all around beneficial practice in combating media related behavioral risks. The next section will address attitudinal risks.

### *The Effectiveness of Media Literacy Training in Combating Attitudinal Risks*

Media literacy training has also been suggested to help reduce attitudinal risks such as negative social outlooks like consumerism, sexism and racism. The media literacy tools of identifying and analyzing persuasive advertising messages and increased critical thinking skills are beneficial in reducing these risks. These two skill sets will be addressed in the paragraphs that follow. First, media literacy has been suggested to help children identify and analyze advertisements. Research has demonstrated that children (especially young children) have a limited ability to evaluate the persuasive messages contained in advertisements (John, 1999). With the influx of covert advertisements, scholars wonder whether children can even detect the presence of an advertisement, let alone evaluate and think critically about it (Greenfield, 2004; Stern & An, 2009). Because advertisements can contain persuasive messages and ideologies like consumerism that are useful to selling their products, it is important that viewers know how to critically evaluate them. Skills like questioning the intent of images and commercials have been successfully taught in media literacy programs (Hoffman, 2000). The following research summaries convey some of the research done to test the effectiveness of media literacy interventions relating to the analysis of both traditional and covert advertisements.

In one study, undergraduate students were shown an hour long media literacy film illuminating unrealistic depictions and promises found in some ads. After viewing the video and looking at sample advertisements, students were reportedly more critical of the products promoted in the ads along with the methods used to sell them (Ford, LaTour, & Middleton, 1999). In a similar study, 145 college students were given three hour long media literacy training sessions teaching them to ask several analytical questions: who created the advertising message, why did they create it, and what design techniques did they use? Their results showed that the female participants were more analytical and critical of the advertisements they viewed post intervention, but the intervention had no effect on male participants (Reichert, LaTour, Lambiase, & Adkins, 2007). Even though the second study showed an advantage for female learners, most of the other studies reviewed showed no difference in intervention effectiveness for males and females.

Media literacy training has been suggested to teach young people (excluding infants) how to critically evaluate traditional advertisements that are obviously ads, but what about the case of children and covert advertisements? Because covert advertisements are relatively new to the advertising scene, there is little research exploring the effectiveness of media literacy interventions in teaching critical covert ad viewing techniques. However, one study was reported in 2009. Stern and An (2009) measured children's ability to identify embedded commercial sponsorships (covert advertisements) in entertainment texts. The researchers looked particularly at "advergames"—a type of online computer game that is either an ad in itself or contains product placement. For example, Post Cereal has developed games directed toward

children for many of its cereals. In the study, 138 fourth graders were given a media literacy intervention teaching them how to detect commercial sponsorships and embedded advertising as well as how to analyze and identify ad motives in entertainment texts. Even after a ten minute intervention where teachers explained this media literacy information, the children were much more likely to spot the sponsor and assess the motive of the entertainment text. Therefore, media literacy interventions have been suggested to be effective for both college and elementary school students in teaching critical awareness and evaluation of persuasive intent (in both covert and traditional advertisements).

In addition to the skills of identifying and understanding advertisements (often promoting problematic attitudes like consumerism and negative body image), critical thinking skills can also combat potentially problematic social outlooks and ideologies (Feuerstein, 1999). Critical thinking tactics taught in media literacy programs are aimed at teaching young people to question their own thought processes, and to critically question the messages they encounter based on their own personal standards (Feuerstein, 1999). This sort of teaching gives students personal agency over mass media messages. They can choose to accept or reject various attitudes often contained in social and cultural messages (whether good or bad) instead of neglecting to think about them or critically engage them. Critical thinking is defined as “thinking about thinking” or meta-cognition (Feuerstein, 1999). This valuable tool is useful in many contexts including the mitigation of attitudinal risks contained in media texts. Several studies have tested the effectiveness of media literacy centered critical thinking training.

The next few paragraphs will address the specifics of research supporting efficacy of media literacy training.

Hoffmann (1999) conducted a three year study with 300 five to twelve year-old participants. Using surveys, interviews and worksheets along with a media literacy intervention aimed at teaching critical thinking skills, Hoffman found that media literacy training has a positive effect on students' critical thinking processes regarding mediated messages over time. In the same year, Feuerstein (1999) conducted similar research with ten to twelve year-olds. She too wanted to test the effectiveness of media literacy interventions in instituting critical thinking skills. Two hundred and seventy three participants received media literacy training for one to two hours per week for several weeks. The lessons were administered by teachers in six different schools. They encouraged students to reflect on messages encountered in the media, and question the opinions communicated therein. Students were tested two months after the intervention to assess retention of critical thinking lessons. The results suggested that training in media literacy is indeed effective in increasing critical thinking skills among elementary aged students over time. The researcher also proposed that increased exposure to media literacy content can result in greater retention of media analysis and critical thinking skills (Feuerstein, 1999).

Livingstone and Helsper (2006) reported that as children grow older, they become more responsive to critical thinking lessons on mediated messages and tend to learn the lessons more quickly. Even though we've seen that media centered critical thinking lessons are effective for elementary age children, there is reason to believe the curriculum would be even more effective for older students. This is because children



become more responsive to critical thinking lessons, learn more quickly, and retain more of the information relating to critical thinking skills in middle and high school. Throughout the grades, media literacy content demonstrates effectiveness in raising critical awareness as it pertains to competing social outlooks in the media.

### *The Effectiveness of Media Literacy Training in Teaching Technical Production Skills*

In addition to skills that combat media related risks, teaching children technical production skills (a part of complete media literacy programs) has been suggested to be not only effective, but also helpful in student engagement and learning. Not all media literacy curriculum is geared toward reading and analyzing media, some address how to create it. One article reported the positive results of an elementary school instituting technical media literacy skills. After implementing a media literacy program geared at teaching technical skills including using the internet, assessing the quality of various websites and creating digital projects using various applications like PowerPoint and Excel, fourth graders showed several levels of improvement. Not only did they learn new technical skills, but they also performed better than years before them on their yearend English language arts test—72% of students involved in the program met or exceeded the benchmark criteria for English language arts (Barone & Wright, 2008). This study suggests that incorporating additional material into English language arts (in the form of technical media literacy) does not hurt student achievement (by taking student attention away from core content), but can actually help it. Moreover, the technical media literacy lessons were advantageous in teaching students new skills that can help them function in their digital media world.

Another study reported the effectiveness of a digital program in improving student writing skills. In their report, Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) gave several anecdotes from various types of elementary students who benefited as a result of learning technical media literacy skills. A digital tool used to help students write stories referred to as a “digital story teller” was the element of technical media literacy tested. Digital story tellers allow students to use not only words, but also images, sounds, and music to tell stories. As a result of the new tool and program, more students engaged with the writing process. Children who had not previously been good at or interested in writing stories became engaged and produced quality work. As a result of the technical media literacy extension, some elementary students became better writers and more interested in writing. This part of media literacy education not only teaches technical media production skills but also engages students in a new way and can help their yearend assessment scores.

While most of the media literacy research supports its effectiveness in teaching various media literacy related ends, there has been some research which challenges its effectiveness. Some of the self-esteem media literacy interventions reviewed above showed an effect for females only and no effect for males (Richert et al., 2007). Furthermore, two additional studies showed that while a media literacy intervention including a cognitive activity was effective in reducing aggression, an instructional intervention by itself was not. The cognitive activity required students to be active in the learning process by writing paragraphs about the material or creating short videos, while the instructional intervention simply gave a lecture with no student participation (Bryne, 2009; Huesman et al., 1983). This research shows that the method used is important,

and not all methods are effective all the time. Other authors point toward a slight exaggeration in some media effects research saying that media does not cause bad behavior singlehandedly, but merely is one of the numerous factors contributing to it. Thus, media literacy training cannot be seen as the “cure all” for bad behavior or attitudinal issues among children (Levine & Murnen, 2009). Nevertheless, when taken together, the majority of research points toward the general effectiveness of media literacy interventions when conducted properly.

In addition, each of the NCA standards are demonstrated in the various media literacy interventions used throughout these projects—another reason these standards can be regarded as reasonable and teachable. Overall, media literacy interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in teaching children critical thinking, analytical, and technical creation skills.

### Conclusion

Even with some outlying data challenging the effectiveness of media literacy training, the research as a whole supports the increased readiness media literacy training can provide for children in a digital and media driven culture. The span of the research conveyed above encompasses every age group within public schooling, both short and long term media literacy interventions, and different types of media literacy interventions including videos, lectures, and interactive creative projects. Each of the NCA standards is reflected in the various interventions used throughout the research. With all of the media literacy interventions combined, not only can students effectively learn how to better read and interpret the media, but they can also learn how to produce media.

Many of the studies facilitate short involvement with media literacy training. In the controlled experiments, participants may only have been given an abbreviated course on media literacy. Even so, this sometimes short exposure to media literacy messages still aids students' interpretation and response to mediated content. Increasing the amount of exposure a student has with media literacy messages can increase their positive responses toward mediated content (Scharrer, 2002). Therefore, programs involving a more prolonged intervention that spans several grades will be more effective than those that are shorter, even though shorter interventions are still advantageous. This provides encouragement for the students in states with lacking media literacy programs. While they may not get complete media literacy training, students will benefit from even a small measure of media literacy training.

This is not to imply that the research is complete in proving the absolute effectiveness of media literacy training for all students. Some outcomes are hard to measure, such as whether increasing one's critical awareness actually decreases the effect the mass media has on viewer's attitudes. Does a student need to be currently hearing media literacy messages in order to activate a critical response? Does the effectiveness of the lessons last, and if so, for how long? The specific answers to these questions are difficult to attain. In addition, all students are different. Media will affect different children differently, and media literacy training will affect different students differently. It is not possible to provide an application of media literacy that will work equally well for all students (Scharrer, 2002). Nevertheless, taking the positive effects that have been demonstrated, teachers and researchers can support and institute media literacy standards in confidence that media literacy training does have an impact

and is helping young people understand and competently participate in their media saturated world.

The National Communication Association provides standards for a well rounded media literacy program. Using these standards, other programs can be assessed for adequacy. The necessities of a complete and adequate program include that a student understand: how people use the media, the relationships between audiences and media content, media content's social and cultural implications, the commercial nature of media, and how to use media to communicate.

When applied, training in media literacy provides a plethora of benefits. It can mitigate disordered eating habits, and the feelings that contribute to them. It can decrease the acceptance of alcohol drinking norms and the desire to imitate viewed behaviors. Training in media literacy has also been demonstrated to improve sexual decision making patterns among young people. In addition, these interventions have decreased participant desire to imitate violence viewed on mass media. They have increased critical awareness and evaluation skills of persuasive and covert advertisements and increased critical thinking skills useful in combating problematic social and cultural outlooks. Lastly, media literacy interventions have been suggested to teach new technical skills, making better writers and improving yearend English language arts scores. When taken together, the research provides a list of benefits that would be useful to any American student. Even though any one of these benefits would be helpful, giving all of these benefits to students by incorporating a completely NCA adequate program would be even better. The next chapter will detail what is going on in the United States in regard to media education. Are American students receiving all of

the benefits media literacy training can provide? A history of media literacy's growth in the U.S. followed by the synopsis of current media literacy programs across the country (analyzed using the NCA standards), and finally a list of the challenges that face states when trying to incorporate adequate programs will be outlined.

## CHAPTER 3.

### MEDIA LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES: ITS HISTORY, CURRENT SITUATION, AND CHALLENGES

The current mediated environment for children in the United States is risky. Children are exposed to poor behavioral examples, questionable social outlooks and potentially harmful persuasive advertisements. Media literacy training can reduce media related behavioral and attitudinal risks for children. As long as programs (as evidenced by their standards) adhere to the standards set by NCA, they can be effective in helping children thoroughly navigate the media. This chapter will address media literacy's application in the United States in order to provide the reader with background information on the Texas' media literacy case study, and suggest that there are still improvements that need to be made in order to ensure that students across America are educated with adequate media literacy standards. To provide context, media literacy's history in the United States will be summarized, highlighting three significant shifts. Then, several patterns existent in current media literacy standards across the United States will be presented followed by a discussion of the current challenges hindering adequate dissemination of media literacy standards. This information will provide context for and then show what is lacking in U.S. media literacy programs in order to demonstrate that there is a need for improvement.

#### A Brief History of Media Literacy in American Schools

To convey the story of media literacy's rise, I will use Guo-Ming Chen's (2007) organization of America's media literacy history consisting of the inoculation, facing-it, and transitional phases. His method of organization simplifies media literacy's history

into the three primary stages, which ultimately help to illuminate the major shifts happening throughout its history in America.

### *The Inoculation Stage*

Although scholars like Theodor Adorno, Marshall McLuhan and John Culkin were critiquing the mass media in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, media literacy's solidification as a field began in the 1960s (Chen, 2007). As mass media gained momentum with the rising popularity of radio and television, people began asking questions about its quality and message. Experimentation with media education formats occurred during this stage. The first television production studio in an elementary school was developed in New York. The Ford Foundation sponsored an experimental high school television station helping students understand how and why media is created (Center for Media Literacy, 2009). Iowa educators pioneered a similar effort called "Media Now," a module-based curriculum designed to teach children media evaluation tools through hands on lessons creating various types of mediated messages (Center for Media Literacy, 2009).

On top of individual programs beginning to emerge, UNESCO was one of the first major media literacy advocacy groups to start in 1964 (Kubey, 2003). Even with these early developments, parents and educators were slow to combat the media's impact and generally did not consider media literacy training the solution to media related issues (Chen, 2007). Educational efforts were focused on traditional schemes of teaching primary subjects and classical texts. The current and popular mass media content of that time were not generally considered subjects worthy of education. In



order to deal with the mass media's increased presence in American culture, many educators promoted what Chen (2007) calls "inoculation."

According to this model, mass media audiences were understood as blank slates waiting to soak up any information presented to them. Because mass media were generally regarded as morally and culturally degrading, the inoculism (also referred to as protectionist) media literacy view encouraged audiences to simply avoid (instead of evaluate and understand) the negative influences of the mass media. Some individuals ascribing to this ideology differentiated between good and bad media depending on the piece's aesthetic and artistic value. "Good" media were deemed worthy of viewing, and "bad" media as needing to be avoided (Thoman, 1990). Even though there was some growth during this era, mass media messages were generally only mentioned in classrooms to demean their value instead of engaging a more analytical, critical thinking centered media literacy lesson (Chen, 2007).

### *The Facing-It Stage*

Perspectives of media literacy began to change in the 1970s. The inoculation approach was becoming less effective as people became more engrossed in mass media. Television sets became a common household item. By 1978, 98% of American homes had a TV set (Television History, 2009). As a result of this rise in mass mediation, more people began to question its impact. Critical thinking regarding mass media began to emerge across the country. People began to question whether mass media alter perceptions of reality and whose interests it served. Speculation started regarding ownership trends and production mechanics (Chen, 2007).

During this stage, mass media were generally used in curricula as enticement. People began to realize there was no retreating from mass media's ubiquity, and children's interest in the mass media could be used as a tool for obtaining student attention-by using films or popular books in the classroom. Mass media entered into the classroom, but not in the way current media literacy advocates would hope. Some teachers included pop songs or clips from movies as a part of their lessons on classical subjects. Critiquing controversial media texts like those promoting sexism and racism were not the focus of classroom study.

Outside of public school curricula, a significant church group formed which called its adult education classes, "Television Awareness Training." The training was a ten week course that was taught in churches and community venues. The lessons focused on advertising, news, children's use of the mass media and issues such as violence, promiscuity and stereotyping. Some consider this course to be the first real predecessor of current media literacy programs (Center for Media Literacy, 2009).

The general outlook on media literacy improved toward the end of the 1970s when Boston University joined with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the U.S. Office of Education to create a program for use in public schools called "Television Literacy: Critical Television Viewing Skills," in 1979. This project was meant to generate curricular guidelines based on media education goals, but was not received well (Kubey, 1998). The then governor of Wisconsin, William Paxton, attacked the government issued grant for the project as wasteful and a favor to "friends" at Boston University. To make matters worse, in November of 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected as president and moved to end the Department of Education. The critical viewing

research project dissolved just six months after Reagan was elected to office in 1980 (Kubey, 1998). Thus, both local and federal government forces hindered the advancement of “Television Literacy: Critical Television Viewing Skills,” and the potential spread of media literacy along with it.

Even though there was opposition toward media education, more individuals and organizations were beginning to advocate for media literacy training. In 1975, the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) circulated a statement that supported media literacy. In it, the Council encouraged teachers to prepare students for the plethora of information they receive from media sources (Lacina, 2006). In the 1980s (marking the beginning of the transitional stage explained next), critical questions received significant attention, and the concept of media literacy gained momentum.

### *The Transitional Stage*

In the 1980s, air time on television made a shift from entertainment and government initiated programming to more commercial programming. The number of advertisements on television jumped, and new programming emerged dedicated solely to selling products (e.g. *The Home Shopping Network*). This switch was a contributing factor to the field of media literacy’s growth (Chen, 2007). Along with this shift to more commercial air time came a shift in thinking. It became understood by those in the media literacy field that the media produce meaning (Chen, 2007). Entire shows were created to sell products, and the number of advertisements on television continued to rise. Because those selling messages were effective, the messages being dispersed were changing what people thought they needed to buy. Thus, new meaning was being produced for viewers, and the potential to influence consumer thinking became an issue

in the field of media literacy. Advocates began to question whether advertising methods were ethical. This ideological advancement was instrumental in the progression of media literacy into what it is today.

By the 1990s, the media literacy movement gained impetus and numerous organizations arose across the nation along with a plethora of research supporting the need for K-12 media education programs. A greater focus was placed on the critical evaluation of mediated messages instead of avoidance or denial of its impact. The first “National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy” was held in 1992 by the Aspen Institute and made a significant contribution to the effort of incorporating media literacy content into education systems along with solidifying and defining the movement as a whole (Aufderheide, 2004). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published an important piece entitled *Great Transitions: Preparing Your Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1995). In it the researchers pointed to the importance of critical viewing to confront the number of mediated messages circulating the country.

Another noteworthy step was the federal government deciding to confront drug problems among America’s youth. In 1995, the Office of National Drug Control Policy convened at the White House. During this meeting, media literacy was advanced as a part of national policy to prevent drug use among young people. With this move, the U.S. government was suggesting that the mass media held suggestive power to influence children to use drugs (Considine, 2002). Many other organizations sprang up during this time including The Partnership for Media Education in 1997 and the Alliance for a Media Literate America in 2000 (Center for Media Literacy, 2009). All of these

organizations have played an important role in organizing parents, teachers and activists and ultimately furthering the media literacy agenda.

Although historically, calls for media literacy were not widely heeded, the history of media literacy in the United States shows that the amount of attention and programs designed to institute and teach media literacy has grown over time. Despite this growth, when compared to other English speaking countries, media education in the U.S. needs improvement. To illustrate this need, the next section will address the range of advanced to poor programs in the United States based on each state's standards for education. While media literacy programs have spread significantly in the past decade, and every state has incorporated some measure of media literacy content into their standards, these inclusions can be crude and misunderstood (Chen, 2007; Hobbs 1994).

### Mapping Media Literacy Standards in the United States

In order to provide a national context for the Texas Viewing and Representing program and to demonstrate that the vast majority of American media literacy programs are lacking, a review of what is currently happening in media literacy standards across the United States is provided in this section. There have been new developments in state media literacy programs (according to their standards for education) in recent years. The number of states incorporating media literacy related standards, and the amount of these standards has significantly increased. Nevertheless, improvement is still needed, and details of that improvement will be illuminated here.

It should be noted that standards alone were evaluated and not actual program outcomes. State standards communicate to schools what learning outcomes need to be

achieved via curriculum. Just because a state has excellent standards does not guarantee excellent implementation of the standards. Therefore, while state standards are a predictor of what public school students in any given state will learn, they cannot accurately determine how media literate students in each state actually are.

To assess each state's media literacy standards, several sources were used. First, I reviewed literature published by scholars who have conducted comparisons of state standards. Second, I used the Media Literacy Clearinghouse website (<http://www.frankwbaker.com/default1.htm>) to access each state's education standards as they pertain to media literacy. This webpage was originally authored by Frank Baker in 1999, and is updated regularly. It pulls together the media literacy elements of every state's standards, providing a convenient way to cycle through numerous different state standards from one website. To begin my analysis, I read the media literacy related standards for each state and determined which states qualified as "advanced" meaning they fully adhered to at least four of NCA's five criteria for an adequate program. Because the number of advanced states was small and because Texas is the only state with fully adequate standards, it was determined that the large majority of states are lacking in their media literacy standards. Several patterns emerged pertaining to the number of states incorporating media literacy in their standards and why, where media literacy content is placed in the standards, followed by similarities among advanced, mediocre and lacking programs.

#### *Which States are Incorporating Media Literacy Standards and Why*

Every state currently incorporates some measure of media literacy training that is close to or consistent with one or more of the NCA competency statements addressed

in chapter two (Kubey & Baker, 1999). This is a significant improvement over media literacy incorporation in the past according to scholars who have been following state standards over the years (Goulden, 1998; Kubey & Baker, 1999). In the mid-1990s only a handful of states made any acknowledgement of media literacy in their state standards (Kubey & Baker, 1999). One primary contributing factor to this increase in media education was national English language arts and reading agencies suggesting the inclusion of media literacy training in the late 1990s (Goulden, 1998).

Although the federal government does not mandate national standards for curriculum in the United States, some agencies publish suggestions for national standards. Many states consider these documents when writing their standards (Tyner, 1998). The primary group that suggests national English language arts and reading standards is the National Council of Teachers of English-International Reading Association (NCTE-IRA) (Goulden, 1998). In the late 1990s, NCTE-IRA updated their English language arts and reading guide to include speaking, listening and viewing or media literacy into the former domain of only reading, writing and literature (Brewbaker, 1997). After this shift, many state standards began incorporating some form of media literacy material.

It is difficult to determine whether the new national standards changed decision makers' minds about the importance of media literacy or whether NCTE-IRA was simply responding to new priorities as expressed by teachers and decision makers. NCTE-IRA's stated goal is "to define, as clearly and specifically as possible, the current consensus among literacy teachers and researchers about what students should learn in the English language arts-reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually

representing” (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996, p. 1). The Agency takes input from teachers and researchers in writing the standards for what students should learn. Whatever the impetus, it is likely that the agency’s incorporation of media literacy content impacted the standards of many states.

But NCTE-IRA did not act entirely alone. Another force that contributed to the increase in media literacy standards was the addition of media literacy by The College Board Standards for College Success Report in 2006. The College Board releases standards for K-12 education based on what students should know before entering college. It is regarded as the primary source for determining college readiness standards (The College Board, 2006). Its current standards include the following English language arts strands: reading, writing, speaking, listening and media literacy. Media literacy content has its own strand and a total of fifteen pages devoted to describing exactly what college ready seniors should understand about the media. The three basic standards that are elaborated upon in the document include: (1) understanding the nature of media, (2) understanding, interpreting, analyzing and evaluating media communication, and (3) composing and producing media communication (The College Board, 2006). Understanding, analysis and production are focused on as different skills necessary for college ready students.

These skills and their descriptions resemble NCA standards for media literacy competency and are a force in influencing standard updates among many states (Kubey & Baker, 1999). As an applicable and well circulated document, the NCA standards for K-12 education also served to influence some states to include media literacy in their



standards (Berko et. al., 1998). In summary, suggestions for media literacy inclusion from English language arts and reading agencies influenced the influx of media literacy content in public schools. The next section will explore media literacy standards in more detail by looking at where it is located within the state education plans.

### *Where Media Literacy Standards are Located in the Subjects*

The next pattern that emerged when looking at various state standards pertains to the subject area under which media content is placed. Media literacy standards can be found under one (or more) of four different subject areas. Although media literacy content is most commonly found under the English language arts subject area--all fifty states include some mention of media education in English language arts--it is also found under others. Many states incorporate media literacy content in several subjects, using an "across the curriculum" approach. Forty-five states locate media literacy in the health/consumer skills subject area, and thirty-four states place additional media literacy material in the social studies/ history subject area. Seven states include media literacy material in an independent strand. These independent, media related strands are distinguished by a title pertaining specifically to media or technical literacy. As the data show, many states incorporate media literacy content in more than one subject area, and the amount of content varies greatly (Baker, 1999).

### *Patterns of Advanced, Mediocre and Poor Programs*

Even though many states are incorporating media literacy standards across subjects, that content is often lacking, and the standards still need improvement when assessed according to NCA's comprehensive media literacy standards. Although the programs might touch on or fulfill one of the standards released by NCA, very few of

them facilitate complete media literacy training by sufficiently including all five of NCA's standards. This shows that improvement is needed in order to bring media literacy training across the United States to adequate standards. Nevertheless, there are some advanced programs. To illustrate the spectrum of media literacy programs that range from great to lacking, a selection of advanced, mediocre and poor programs will be reviewed in the paragraphs that follow. States are rated based on how many of the NCA standards they completely fulfill. Advanced programs thoroughly address 4-5 of the NCA standards, while mediocre programs address 2-3, and poor programs address 0-1. Patterns found within these program categories are also addressed.

Among the most advanced programs (according to their media literacy standards) are Texas, Florida, California, Massachusetts, and Minnesota (Considine, 2002; Kubey & Baker, 1999). These states' media literacy standards share several characteristics that may be helpful in guiding other programs to advance, and in gauging where even the best programs need improvement. The questions of whether NCA standards are met, under which subject area media literacy standards tend to fall, and which grades incorporate media literacy standards will be addressed.

First of all, only one of the programs (Texas) satisfied all five of the NCA competency statements completely, although the others came close. Four of the five states only lacked fully consistent content in one of the five NCA standards. The standards that were least addressed were standard five (demonstrating the ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences) in California and Minnesota, along with standard three (demonstrating knowledge and understanding that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts) in Massachusetts, and standard four

(demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the commercial nature of media) in Florida. Standards one (demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives) and two (demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the complex relationships among audiences and media content) were well addressed in all of the advanced states' media literacy standards.

The issue of media creation in standard five could be remedied by adding benchmarks that detail the student's ability and experience with creating media for various purposes. Thoroughly incorporating standard three requires a state's standards to address the media related implications for various social outlooks and/or culture groups represented in the media. Standard four involves addressing the commercial nature of media. The latter two standards are a bit more complex as they relate to social construction and persuasion, but the complexity of these topics should not steer schools away from addressing them. Rather, school standards should address them in even greater detail in order to reduce ambiguity. Understanding how people use media and the complex relationships that exist between audiences and media content (standards one and two) are relatively simpler concepts, which may be why each of the programs incorporates them so well.

These standards are well incorporated in the subject areas of English language arts and health across the advanced states. Social studies has the least amount of media literacy content, particularly in Minnesota and Florida. Minnesota was the only advanced state that currently has a separate media literacy related strand called "Information and Technical Literacy" (Baker, 2000d). The in-depth inclusion of media literacy content across two to three subject areas can be challenging. In some schools it

will require several different teachers to be familiar with media literacy in order to teach it—particularly in middle and high schools where teachers are divided by subject. Nevertheless, this across the curriculum approach may help in incorporating the valuable material without pushing too much already existing material out of any one subject area.

The last pattern evident in advanced programs involves the grade levels at which media literacy training is incorporated. The programs vary as to when they begin media literacy training. Texas' current program begins in kindergarten whereas Florida introduces students to media literacy in the seventh grade (Baker, 2000a, 2000b). All of the programs include in-depth media literacy material in the high school grades, and most of them have quality material in middle school standards as well. Only three of the programs begin media literacy in elementary school (Texas, California and Massachusetts). In the cases where media literacy content begins later in a student's life, the material appears to be more compact, which could be both advantageous and disadvantageous. It could be advantageous, because students receive larger quantities of the material in a smaller amount of time, which could result in a more compact and deep study. But this could also be a disadvantage, because students may be more vulnerable to media related risks as elementary aged children without media literacy knowledge. All in all, the advanced program's standards vary and most are still lacking in different areas.

Many U.S. programs fall somewhere in between advanced and severely lacking. The next category of media literacy programs described is the mediocre group. Montana, Idaho, New Jersey, and Alabama are examples for this group. These state's

programs incorporate a degree of media literacy training, but there are major holes within their content. Although many of the “mediocre” programs incorporate either two or three of NCA’s standards adequately, there are recurring problems with some of the content including: vague standards and media literacy related but not completely relevant standards. Many of the lower grade’s standards are too vague. For example, Alabama’s sixth grade English language arts standard says that students should “recognize propaganda” but does not specify what type of propaganda (Baker, 2000g, p. 1). It could be media related or not. Even in the upper grades, Idaho includes vague standards including, “Evaluate various print and non print sources” (Baker, 2000f, p. 1). Alabama lists a similar English language arts standard that reads, “Apply critical reading and viewing skills to analysis of print and non print media” (Baker, 2000g). Although these standards may sound appropriate, they are not specific enough to facilitate quality media literacy content. What sort of evaluation is intended? Are there specific types of sources a teacher should address? What exactly should be included in print and non print sources? The way many of the standards read is open to interpretation, and teachers are left with little detail. They could potentially teach the standard without addressing media literacy.

Furthermore, some of the standards listed in mediocre programs may relate to media literacy content, but are far from consistent with a NCA standard. For example, New Jersey has a standard that reads, “All students will learn how to participate in the constitutional system of government” (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010). Although democratic participation may require some media related critical thinking skills in order to evaluate political sources, etc, the connection is not clear in the

standard. Goulden (1998) found a similar pattern in her research and reported on the inclusion of media related terms like “viewing,” but despite the relevant sounding term, the standard itself could be far from quality media literacy content. While some of the standards in mediocre programs were vague and potentially irrelevant to media literacy, others were consistent with the NCA standards. All in all, the programs in the middle of the media literacy quality spectrum have some valuable content but are lacking detail and consistency with NCA standards in other areas.

The poor media literacy programs show a similar need for improvement, only more severely. Kansas, Mississippi, and Rhode Island are examples from this category. When looking at these state’s programs, the list of their media literacy related standards is limited in comparison to mediocre and advanced states. Where mediocre state standards fulfill between two to three NCA criteria, poor programs fulfill zero to one. Kansas adequately fulfills NCA standard five (demonstrating the ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences), but doesn’t touch on any of the others. Mississippi also comes very close to fulfilling standard five by asking students to create an advertisement in their health class. Rhode Island does not fulfill any of the NCA criteria.

Like the mediocre programs, poor programs lack specific media related content. In several of Kansas’ standards communicating what appears to be the state’s attempt to incorporate media literacy training, phrases like “analyzing bias” and “stereotypes in propaganda” are used, but no specific reference to media is mentioned (Kansas State Department of Education, 2010). Mississippi includes several similar standards. By leaving the standards vague, lessons on propaganda and bias could be taught without

ever touching on media. In poor programs, almost all of the standards that reference media literacy are vague and need more detail.

Some subject areas in poor programs do not even mention the word “media.” In all of Rhode Island’s media literacy standards spanning English language arts, health and social studies, the word “media” is only mentioned twice. In those two inclusions, it is listed in a group of other texts or influences (Baker, 2000e). Other states also use the word “media” within a list of other texts. Here is an example: “the student will analyze the influence of culture, media, technology and other factors on health” (Kansas State Department of Education, 2010). The term “media” is mentioned in a list of other broad influences, which causes mediated content to lose attention, because it is not situated as the focus of the standard. As a result, teachers are potentially less compelled to focus on such a small aspect of a standard when compared to some of the other states that include detailed information and numerous media literacy standards across subjects. Overall, poor programs reveal several problems existent in some of American media literacy standards: too little content, a lack of consistency with NCA criteria, and very vague standards.

This analysis provides a way of conceptualizing the spectrum of advanced to poor programs as reflected by their education standards. The states referenced represent three categories and everything in between can be found when exploring all of the states’ standards. The analysis supports that the majority of states do not adhere to NCA’s five criteria for complete media literacy standards and are therefore lacking fully adequate programs. Texas is the only state to adequately fulfill all five of NCA’s criteria. Therefore, the remaining forty-nine states do not have fully adequate standards

when compared to NCA's five criteria. Overall, the states have varying amounts of media literacy material in their K-12 standards. Although significant improvements are being made, most of the states are still lacking in their media literacy standards (Chen, 2007; Hobbs, 1994).

Further contributing to this need for improvement, Goulden (1998) writes that state decision makers often have "rudimentary vision of the teaching practice of media literacy" (p. 201). Even when states agree that media literacy is an important subject to incorporate, decision makers and standard writers may not have sufficient understanding of the field. Furthermore, even if curricular standards are written precisely, there is no guarantee that excellent standards will translate into quality of presentation and sufficient implementation (Kubey & Baker, 1999). The next section explores these and other challenges that states have faced and may still be facing when incorporating media literacy.

#### Current Obstacles to Media Literacy Training in the United States

The recent improvements to media literacy incorporation throughout the United States are undeniable. But why was the incorporation so recent? What took the states so long to incorporate media literacy standards, and why are most of the state programs still lacking? What kind of challenges might some states have faced and still possibly be facing? Several of these challenges will be discussed below: geography, a lack of national education policy, a heterogeneous population, a lack of motivation, a lack of training for educators, and policy making obstacles (Kubey, 1998; Kubey, 2003; Schwarz, 2005; Yates, 2004). Addressing these challenges provides an idea of potential problems that may need to be confronted in order to further improve media literacy



programs across the U.S. In addition, the case study on Texas' program will address how some of these challenges were overcome or are still presenting issues.

Geography plays a major role in hindering a cohesive spread of media literacy standards throughout the country. The U.S. is comprised of fifty states that spread across 3.6 million square miles. Each state has its own leaders in education and numerous local school boards below them. As outlined above, media literacy content varies greatly from state to state. Small countries have an easier time spreading the word among concerned parents and teachers and subsequently implementing curricular changes nationwide (Schwarz, 2005). The sheer size and organization of the U.S. leads to fragmentation. U.S. educational policy is set up to be run on a state and local level. The national government holds very little control over what is taught in schools. In fact, only about 4% of educational funding in the United States comes from the federal government (Kubey, 2003). Ultimately, states determine their education standards (Kubey, 1998). Therefore, instituting cohesive and adequate national media literacy standards in K-12 public schools requires individual agreement from numerous school boards across the country.

There are groups that influence education standards nationwide including NCTE-IRA, the College Board, and NCA. Although states do not have to follow the standards these groups provide, many states consult them when creating and updating standards. The size and organization of educational policy may have been a factor in delaying the United States adoption of media literacy standards, and may be the reason some programs are adequate while others are lacking.

The next factor that may have been (and could still be) a hindrance to widespread quality media standards is a lack of motivation when compared to other countries (Kubey, 2003). Because the United States is the leading exporter of mass media content, other countries import large amounts of our cultural messages represented in our media. Some American mass media exports promote arguably bad behavior like promiscuity, drug use, and violence. As a result, other countries have heightened incentives to issue counter messages for their students and citizens, which may have been why other English speaking countries had more advanced and widespread media literacy programs before the U.S. Many media literacy programs abroad include information encouraging their students to think critically about the messages they consume and differentiate them from their own cultural values. The United States, on the other hand, is creating the messages, and that is arguably one reason why it may have been, and (to some degree) still be, less critical of them and less motivated to provide thorough media literacy standards to all students (Kubey, 2003).

A lack of teacher education may also hinder the adequate dissemination of media literacy training to American students. Passing standard changes to incorporate more media literacy material burdens school boards to find a way to provide media literacy training to teachers, which complicates the process. As it stands, there is little funding in most states for teachers to receive training in media education (Flores-Koulish & Deal, 2008; Yates, 2004). Most of the higher education systems that train public school teachers in the United States give little or no information on media literacy, and teacher certification in media literacy is rare (Schwarz, 2005). This trend may be

changing as universities catch up with the recent increase in media literacy standards across the nation. As it currently stands, instead of having nationally supported resources for media education, some teachers are forced to seek their own awareness and training from media literacy organizations, while other states (like Texas) offer free media literacy training workshops for teachers using state and district funds (Flores-Koulish & Deal, 2008). Recent economic difficulties are likely to make this situation worse as school districts are forced to implement budget cuts by reducing and eliminating programs.

An additional issue for teachers is that most curricular plans are already in place. Finding the time and space to adequately incorporate media literacy training is difficult. Other subject matter like computer skills and drug education compete for space in curriculum modules. Some states have successfully overcome this challenge by intertwining media literacy material with existing curriculum. For example, in English language arts, students are taught to read, and part of reading may involve reading the media using interpretation and analysis, while the skills of writing may include media production, etc. Other states may spread media literacy material across different subjects to lessen its impact on any one subject. Even if public school teachers are individually convinced that media literacy training is necessary, some may struggle to find the resources and support helpful to its implementation.

Another challenge lies in the American political outlook in regard to education policy. Media literacy is a relatively new field and as such, faces challenges. Even though there have been recent advancements (all of the states including media literacy training, etc.), the field still encounters challenges as it strives to acquire credibility

among all pertinent educators and policy makers. Policy makers will heed the demand and support for “causes of the moment” as they are referred to in educational reform (Tyner, 1991). But the underlying rule governing whether a “cause of the moment” effects education standards is rooted in a pre-media age America. Tyner (1991) wrote, “The prevailing notion in the United States is that the main purpose of education is to secure gainful employment. The utilitarian view of schooling is historically ingrained” (p. 1). According to Tyner, standard decisions were made based on producing job skills in order for students to gain employment, which usually required technical competence. This historical trend has been hard to change.

Some dissension exists in regard to media literacy’s theoretical basis. Although about one-fifth of media literacy content addresses technical production skills, the majority of its content is based on developing critical thinking and evaluation skills, which are not easily converted into a specific job readiness (National Communication Association, 1998). In some cases (like in Texas), university research and independent media literacy groups have influenced state decision makers resulting in their acknowledgment of the necessity of media literacy skills for a literate and job ready 21<sup>st</sup> century student (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010). As a result, states like Texas and California have incorporated advanced media literacy standards into their public school plans. Thus, the media literacy field faces the challenge of a policy environment that needs to rethink its history and make changes in light of an evolving environment. While some states still need to address this issue, others (like Texas and California) have already combated the challenge.

Challenges such as vast geography, a lack of national curriculum mandates, a lack of motivation and training for educators, and finally obstacles in educational policy all hinder and have hindered cohesive and effective media education across the country. Amidst these challenges, school boards have the potential to institute media literacy standards, but few do so effectively.

### Conclusion

Ever since the introduction of new mass media forms like television, film and radio to American life, the media literacy movement has steadily grown--advancing through the inoculation, facing it, and transitional phases. As a result of this growth, media literacy training has recently spread to reach all United States public school standards. Even though many of those inclusions are inadequate, the allowances that have taken place are an advancement nonetheless. Programs across the country (as reflected by their standards for education) vary greatly and range from advanced to poor. The vast majority of programs in the spectrum could use improvement. Media literacy standards have faced and continue to face certain challenges when striving for adequate inclusion in state programs. Those challenges range from a vast and diverse national landscape, a lack of national education policy, a heterogeneous population, a lack of motivation, a lack of training for educators, and policy making obstacles.

In order for media literacy programs to be adequate in every state across the country, improvements are needed. To provide an example of advanced standards, the case study that follows will address Texas' media literacy inception, program details, and changes. Some scholars have posited that Texas' media literacy program is (and has been for the past decade) the best media literacy program in the country (Kubey &

Baker, 1999; Goulden, 1998). With this (as of yet unpublished) information, education decision makers across the country will have an example to follow in improving their media literacy programs.

## CHAPTER 4.

### A CASE STUDY ON MEDIA LITERACY IN TEXAS

In a media saturated culture, children in the United States are bombarded with mediated messages (Piegeron, 2008). Not only do most children have televisions in their homes (and many in their bedrooms), they also encounter mediated messages when they are in public--on billboards, on buses, etc. (Lemish, 2008). With technology advancing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, media exposure is advancing with it. Along with many of the mediated messages children encounter are risks. For instance, poor behavioral examples are patterned in entertainment and other media. Problematic and highly persuasive advertising messages can be found in almost every media source, and negative social outlooks are inadvertently modeled. Media literacy is a program of study that helps reduce the media related risks children inevitably face. It also helps prepare children for their media driven world by teaching them media production skills and helping them understand the various types and functions of mediated messages. In order for all American children to have an equal opportunity to learn media literacy and access its benefits, media literacy material needs to be taught in public schools.

Numerous experiments have been conducted suggesting the effectiveness of media literacy training in combating risks and providing benefits to children (Lumb, 2007; Wilksch & Wade, 2009). But, in order to be thoroughly equipped with the benefits and tools that media literacy training offers, children need to be exposed to a complete and adequate media literacy program, which starts with state education standards. The National Communication Association (NCA) has published criteria for American K-12 media literacy programs. They are comprised of five competency statements that every

program should adhere to. The problem is that many American states fail to meet these criteria, and do not offer complete and adequate training to their students. Nevertheless, media literacy has gained significant momentum and credibility in the last decade. There are several states that offer advanced programs, but most states still need improvement in order to offer students all of the benefits that media literacy training has to offer. The account of Texas, one of the first and most advanced media literacy programs in the United States, will be presented here as an example for other states to follow in improving their standards (Considine, 2002; Kubey & Baker, 1999; Tyner, 1998).

Texas was a pioneer state in instituting adequate media literacy standards in 1998. In September of that year, the Texas State Board of Education approved Viewing and Representing and included the standards as one of their four primary curriculum “strands” (meaning subject areas) in the English language arts standards. The program was designed to begin in the fourth grade and continue in varying degrees through the senior year of high school. Its overall goal was to produce critical consumers and capable producers of media (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

In 2008, Texas’ media literacy program changed, and Viewing and Representing was removed from the primary strands. Using data gathered in in-depth, expert interviews, a legislative review, and a general literature review, this chapter uncovers the story of Texas’ media literacy program. The legislative review portion includes analysis of the following primary sources: (1) audio archives and archived minutes of the Texas State Board of Education meetings held since 2004, (2) curriculum training documents used in the implementation phase of the programs, and (3) the actual



education standard documents themselves. The literature review portion includes an EBSCOHost and Lexus-Nexus search of terms related to Texas and media literacy. Even though this portion of the research did not yield much data, it was useful in assessing the lack of published information on the topic. Due to this deficiency, semi-structured, expert interviews were conducted in order to fill gaps in the overall case study. Six experts were interviewed based on their level of involvement with the program. Three of these experts allowed me to use their names and titles. They include Sarah Crippen, the Director of English Language Arts and Reading Curriculum at the Texas Education Agency, Dr. Renee Hobbs, a prolific media literacy author who created part of Texas' media literacy implementation plan, and Deborah Leveranz, the Director of the Southwest Alternate Media Project (SWAMP), a non-profit media group who worked with teachers on the original Texas Education Agency media literacy proposal committee. The three experts who will remain anonymous will be identified as "anonymous a", "anonymous b", and "anonymous c". By combining all of the interview data and including it with the other material gathered, a complete synopsis of Texas' media literacy story will be conveyed including: how Viewing and Representing got started, a description of the program along with a discussion of the changes made to it in 2008, details of the program's implementation and assessment, and finally, resulting lessons for the field. With this important and as of yet unpublished information, other state education decision makers will have a model to consider in more efficiently improving their own media literacy standards and ultimately offering their students the information they need to thrive in a digital, media driven world.

## How Viewing and Representing Got Started

Because Viewing and Representing was one of the first media literacy programs in the country, convincing the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to include this new program in their state standards was a challenge. The TEA had few other states to look to when considering the changes. Even in the face of this challenge, Texas was able to incorporate an advanced and adequate media literacy program. Researching and relaying what it took to institute this program is beneficial in providing information for other states to use in promoting and developing their own programs. In this section, a short description of Texas' educational system will be conveyed followed by a discussion of several influences impacting Viewing and Representing's inception. These influences include: state legislation, federal grants, advocate involvement, and national standard suggestions. This data was gathered primarily from expert interviews, but also from Texas Education Agency documents.

The state of Texas generally follows the national format for education standard creation and assessment (McDonald, 2002). The state has two separate systems used to institute their standards. First, there is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which are essentially standards that are included in a large instructional document that overview the "knowledge and skills" that teachers are required to teach their students. The second system acting in conjunction with the TEKS is the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). TAKS represents the tests used to evaluate students, teachers, and schools to determine whether they are effectively implementing the required state standards (McDonald, 2002). These standards should not be confused with actual curriculum. They are a *framework* for curriculum. That is,

the standards state what a student needs to understand and be able to do. In effect, they represent what should be the final learning outcomes in each year of a student's education (Texas Education Agency, n. d.).

The group with decision making authority in regard to the TEKS and the TAKS is the Texas State Board of Education. The Board may receive input from various outside sources such as university professors, teachers, and research groups. The State Board of Education acts under the authority of the Texas Education Agency and is ultimately responsible for supplying state education standards (Scott, 2007). The Texas Board was influenced by several factors when updating the TEKS to include media literacy training over ten years ago. These influences will be covered in the paragraphs that follow.

First, there were federal and state legislative influences. Prior to the 1980s, state and national education standards were structured differently than they are today. In the 1970s, most of the power to determine education standards lay in the hands of local districts and schools. Because of this, media education was taught in some of the schools throughout the nation, but not in an organized or unified way. Whether anything about the media was included in curriculum was primarily the decision of each individual district. In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan instituted state education standards that included state assessment testing. Emphasis was placed on basic core subjects like reading, writing and math. Few state curriculum programs included media education lessons during this time (D. Leveranz, interview, February 22, 2010).

In the 1990s, state standards encountered another change when the federal government encouraged more rigorous curriculum in American schools and began

motivating state education standard changes with federal funds. The goal was to phase out lower level and remedial high school courses and raise high school graduation standards (Smisko, n.d.). In 1994, the U.S. Congress passed legislation entitled “Goals 2000: Educate America Act.” The act allowed the federal government to financially contribute to certain curriculum/standard plans. In other words, states and school districts were given federal funds to use in developing or improving their standards. Adjustments to standards were not mandatory but were required in order to receive federal aid (Green & Solis, 1997). To help reinforce the Educate America Act, another act called “Goals 2000: America’s Schools Act” was passed. This act held schools accountable for the federal money they spent. The government required that every state receiving federal funds must develop and use assessment tests as an accountability measure to define student progress (Green & Solis, 1997).

As a result of this new legislation, the Texas Education Agency received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 1994 to further develop their English language arts and reading curriculum. The grant specified that Texas was to revise their standards to address what students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should know and be able to do (Smisko, n.d.). In 1996, The Texas Education Agency used the 1.2 million dollars in grant money to pay the University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts (UTCRLA) for new standards research. As a result of this funding, the UTCRLA was able to focus their research on developing new education standards for Texas as well as training and curriculum guides for Texas educators to use in implementing these newly developed standards (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

The creation of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in 1995 was another result of the new legislation and grant money. Committees were created to review and recreate the state standards. Realizing the challenges of keeping up with modern technology, standard teams were charged with insuring 21<sup>st</sup> century relevance and with articulating what each student should know and be able to do in the digital age. The new emphasis on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills was instrumental in furthering the placement of media literacy training on state standards. Media literacy was seen as a new and technologically relevant skill essential to keeping abreast of media and technological developments. (Smisko, n.d.).

The committee created to make proposals for the new English language arts standards consulted the research provided by the UTCRLA and called upon experts knowledgeable about media and technical literacy. This proposal committee was comprised of about fifty educators and educational representatives. Teachers, professors, business professionals, and community members from all over the state of Texas were selected to form a diverse and geographically representative committee (anonymous interview b, February 25, 2010).

Some of the teachers on the committee were advocates of media literacy. Deborah Leveranz (media literacy advocate and interview participant) had worked with some of these teachers. Before the standard revisions began, Leveranz participated in an "Artist in Residence" program that allowed various types of artists, including media artists, to collaborate with teachers and provide lessons to public school children. During this time, Leveranz showed teachers how they could easily incorporate media literacy training into the curriculum they were already comfortable with teaching. The

teachers involved saw the increase in critical thinking skills and student engagement resulting from the media literacy training (D. Levernaz, interview, February 22, 2010). Some of these teachers Levernaz worked with were on the English language arts and reading proposal committee and vouched for the benefits of media literacy training.

The teachers on the committee who were advocating media literacy education hypothesized that a few things were needed in order to properly implement media literacy training (D. Levernaz, interview, February 22, 2010). First, a unique subject strand solely for media literacy material needed to be created. Because the material would be new to most teachers, it needed a prominent position in the standards to get adequate attention. Second, media literacy's strand needed to be placed within a primary subject that was already included in the state tests. This way media literacy material would have a better chance of being included in the state assessment tests. Because teachers tended to (and still do) "teach to the state tests," the inclusion of media literacy was a way to insure that teachers would take the new material seriously and teach it well (D. Levernaz, interview, February 22, 2010). The teachers on the committee also saw this level of material integration as useful in encouraging local colleges to include media literacy classes in their degree training programs. This group of influential educators advocated for media literacy material to be in its own strand and to be included in the state assessment tests.

Even with the support of media literacy education by the proposal committee, the State Board of Education still had to be convinced. Along with the committee's suggestions, volunteers testified before the Board in regard to the necessity of media literacy training in the standards. A testimony given by a group of high school students

was particularly persuasive (anonymous interview b, February 25, 2010). Several articulate and confident students from the Communication Arts High School in San Antonio came before the Board and spoke about their experience with media literacy training. Because their specialized high school focused on communication arts, its unique curriculum already included media literacy. The students mentioned some of the media related projects they had completed along with benefits they experienced as a result of learning media literacy. Thus, the Board heard a unique testimony from a sample of the individuals they were ultimately striving to serve—students.

In addition to legislation, grants, and advocates, new national standard suggestions (from the National Council of Teachers of English-International Reading Association) were emerging that encouraged the inclusion of media literacy material for 21<sup>st</sup> century educational readiness (The College Board, 2006; Goulden, 1998). Because Texas' education decision makers consulted these sources when preparing the standards, they were influential in Texas' inclusion of media literacy training.

In summary, several different influences impacted the decision to include media literacy training in the state education standards of Texas. National and state legislation along with grant money encouraged new standards that focused on students' preparedness for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (including media and digital awareness). Media literacy advocates presented convincing testimonies to the State Board of Education, and national standard recommendations included media literacy training. At the end of the decision process, media literacy material was included as its own strand in English language arts and was also included on the state assessment tests. The next section

will detail exactly what the program looked like once it was approved in 1998, along with how it changed ten years later.

#### Description of Texas' Media Literacy Program and the Details of its Change

Texas' media literacy program recently underwent a change that resulted in the removal of media literacy material as a primary strand of subject matter in English language arts. This change will be addressed after first detailing the Viewing and Representing program's existence from 1998 to 2008, as well as the current media literacy standards that began in Texas with the 2009-2010 school year. A description of events that influenced the program's change will be provided along with an evaluation of whether the change made Texas' media literacy training more or less adequate.

Following is a description of the Viewing and Representing program.

According to the Texas Education Agency, the overarching goal of Viewing and Representing was to create critical consumers and capable producers of media by promoting media literacy training (Crippen, 2008). The curriculum was to start in grade four and continue in varying amounts through the senior year of high school (Crippen, 2008). Even though several subjects like social studies and health would eventually include some media literacy material in their subject matter, the vast majority of media literacy content (including the Viewing and Representing program) was always located in English language arts. Viewing and Representing had its own strand within the standards. There were a total of four strands. Because Viewing and Representing was one of only four, more focus and priority was placed on the material. The concentration of media literacy content within the English language arts caused it to be included in the English language arts TAKS, or end of term assessment tests. In summary, Viewing



and Representing was a 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade program that had its own strand in the English language arts standards.

Just the name “Viewing and Representing” reveals much about what the program aimed to do. The word “Viewing” refers to visual communication, and the necessary skill of understanding and interpreting visual representations like maps, performances, advertisements, and computer graphics. “Representing,” on the other hand, refers to the expression of those skills by the actual creation of media like creating documentaries or PowerPoint presentations (University of Texas Center for Reading & Language Arts, 2004).

After the initial media literacy material was introduced in grade four, it became more complex as students progressed through the grades. To provide an idea of what the material covered, a summary of the fourth to twelfth grade standards is provided here. The overall content is organized based on grade segment and topic. Three grade segments are covered based on the patterns of content found in them. Segment one includes grades four and five (elementary school). Segment two covers grades six through eight (middle school), and segment three covers grades nine through twelve (high school). There was some overlap of content in these grade segments, so the divisions are not always exact. For example, content that started in the fourth grade often extended through the eighth grade instead of ending at grade five.

Furthermore, the Texas Education Agency organized the standards based on three main topics covered. The first was interpretation. This pertained to the understanding and interpretation of visual images, messages, meanings, and representations. The second was analysis, which involved analyzing and critiquing the

significance of visual imagery, messages, meanings and representations, and the third was production, which pertained to the creation of visual representations and other forms of media (Crippen, 2008).

Grades four and five began with relatively simple content. For interpretation, they included describing how meaning is conveyed through visual representations, interpreting maps, charts and even video segments. For the analysis segment, grades four through eight entailed comparing and contrasting visual, print, electronic media and written stories in books while only grades four and five included the evaluation of the works and goals of graphic artists, illustrators and news photographers. On the production side, children in grades four and five as well as six through eight organized or produced visual images to convey meaning and also produced communication using technology and media.

In grades six through eight (middle school), a few things changed. Students followed similar interpretation measures, but advanced in their analysis skills. Analysis in grades six through eight covered the evaluation of not just graphic artists and news photographers but also of documentary filmmakers and political cartoonists, among others. Production skills were advanced to include experimentation and assessment of how language, medium and presentation contributed to the message.

High school material made another content jump. Grades nine through twelve included analyzing various relationships, ideas, and cultures represented in the media. This represents an advance to more socially cognizant material. Students were encouraged to discern the purpose intended in various media forms and the source of media production. They were to learn how to deconstruct media messages as well as

how to evaluate and critique persuasive techniques. Their media criticism skills were honed even more as they learned about media genres and were encouraged to compare and contrast various media outlets covering the same event.

On the production side, high school students were not only taught to compare various media pieces, but they were also taught to analyze how the media might have helped construct part of their own perceptions of reality. This self-evaluation introduced a new level of depth in the program. Students were specifically required to use a variety of technologies such as videos, photographs and web pages to communicate. Additionally, they were required to create a documentary, flier, movie critique, or children's book in grade ten, an advertisement or political campaign in grade eleven, and another documentary or a parody designed for a specific audience in grade twelve. In addition to these required assignments in the English and language arts courses, high school students had the option of taking several media literacy related elective courses containing similar content, only focusing on it in greater detail and depth.

Throughout the grades, students progressed through varying levels of interpreting, analyzing, and producing media. By the time they graduated, Texas students should have been trained in media literacy and much better prepared for their digital world. Although this is only a brief summary of all that the students were required to learn and produce, it provides an idea of how much and what type of material was provided to Texas' students from 1998 to 2008 (Crippen, 2008).

When assessed for adequacy using the NCA criteria for a complete and adequate program, Viewing and Representing adhered to all five of the NCA criteria. Thus, the Viewing and Representing program had a sufficient amount of information in

its standards for students to be prepared to navigate the risks and build the skills needed to succeed in our media-centric culture. Ten years after this program began, it was up for review. In that review process, the Viewing and Representing program changed. The next section communicates the details of that change.

### *Events Leading to Viewing and Representing's Change*

The Viewing and Representing changes started with a customary revision process scheduled to occur every ten years. As the program started in 1998, it was up for review in 2008. The paragraphs that follow chronicle Viewing and Representing's revision and discuss the changes made. This information was gathered primarily from the State Board of Education's website in their archived records of all meetings held since 2004. Supplemental information was also gathered from expert interview participants involved with the process.

The revision started in 2005 (three years before the revisions were actually approved), and was not just for Viewing and Representing, but for all of the English language arts standards. To gather data, the Board of Education requested input from specialists throughout Texas and put together a work group comprised of diverse and knowledgeable nominees to review the standards. In February of 2006, the refinements drafted by the work group were made public on the Texas Education Agency website in order to obtain input from the public. In June of the same year, the Board held a meeting to hear from experts commenting on the suggested refinements for the English language arts TEKS. These experts' backgrounds ranged from professors to consultants to English language arts and standards researchers.

Disagreements arose in regard to the amount of curriculum that should be devoted to media literacy training. Advocates of phonemic awareness and grammar challenged media literacy material in an effort to lobby for additional space for these subjects in the standards (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010; Texas Education Agency, n.d.). Some teachers expressed not wanting media literacy training to have a large amount of emphasis, because there was other content to cover. Nevertheless, the majority of committee members seemed to agree that students needed to have adequate media literacy information in order to understand how to interpret, access and create information—some even suggested putting more emphasis on media literacy content in the new standards (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). A few of the experts commented that the production side of media literacy training should start in later grades such as seventh or eighth, while others thought it should start much earlier. As a result of committee and expert input, the Board charged the review committee to focus on three things: (1) make the standards less repetitive, (2) make them more grade-level specific, and (3) make them more measurable (for state and local assessment purposes) (Texas State Board of Education, 2007).

Because the process was proving difficult and complicated involving so many knowledgeable voices, the Board decided in September of 2007 to hire a facilitator to help with the completion of the TEKS revisions. The facilitator chosen was a representative from a standard writing and revision company called Standards Works. All of the research and feedback gathered up to that point was forwarded to the Standards Works consultant. To thoroughly gather and understand all of the proposals

for changes, the consultant held meetings and phone conferences with committee members and experts involved (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

With this data, in early 2008 the facilitator worked closely with the committee and the Board to make progress revising the TEKS. Experts from local colleges and research groups were called forward a second time to offer their input on the proposed revisions. A public meeting was also held in March of 2008. Approximately sixty members of the public came forward and gave their opinion on the changes. After reviewing the public input, consulting experts, and working with the revision committee, the facilitator summarized and communicated the revisions for the media literacy material by providing a draft of the updated standards (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

By the end of the three-year revision process, the Board received input from revision committee members, experts in the field, the public, and the facilitator. After considering all of the competing interests in regard to media literacy training---what grade to start it in, how detailed to make the standards, whether to keep them in a separate strand or not--the Board approved the revised TEKS for English language arts in May of 2008. The new standards were scheduled for implementation in the 2009-2010 school year (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). The next section will detail the recently approved media literacy program as compared to the old Viewing and Representing program and analyze it for adequacy.

#### *Texas' New Media Literacy Program as Compared to the Old*

In response to the charge to make the English language arts standards less repetitive and more streamlined, the committee agreed to remove Viewing and Representing as a separate strand and incorporate it into the five new English language

arts strands: Reading, Writing, Research, Listening and Speaking, and Oral and Written Communication (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010). It was decided that Viewing and Representing did not need a separate strand, and that including the content in a separate strand was not an efficient approach. In fact, one Board member reported in a meeting that having a wholly separate strand for media literacy material was too overwhelming for teachers, and incorporating it into existing strands would be simpler for them to interpret (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). The content from the previous Viewing portion of the media literacy standards (including analyzing, understanding and interpreting the media) was moved to the “Reading” strand. Content from the previous Representing portion (including the creation of media) was grafted into the “Writing” strand. Because reading and writing can be done with either print or electronic (media) texts, the Board agreed that these skills could be intertwined. They felt that students are simply honing their reading skills when analyzing and reading mediated messages, and using their writing skills when producing media content (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). When the decision was made to remove the Viewing and Representing strand, the name Viewing and Representing was also lost.

Even though media literacy training is not present as a separate strand in the new standards, all of the experts interviewed (who were knowledgeable on the new standards) agreed that the essence of the Viewing and Representing content is still present in the new standards. In fact, some thought that the new standards are more in-depth and detailed than the previous standards. The paragraphs that follow will elaborate on the new media literacy standards. They are organized into elementary,

middle and high school and are discussed in regard to how they differ from the original Viewing and Representing standards.

Throughout all grades, the new English language arts TEKS are separated into five strands. Rather than having its own strand, the media literacy content is generally identified by the titles: “Reading/Media Literacy,” and “Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts.” The major difference found in elementary school TEKS between the previous program and the current one is that media literacy material begins in kindergarten under the new standards rather than in the fourth grade.

The kindergarten standards include identifying media forms and techniques along with recognizing purposes of different forms of media. These standards remain through the second grade and are accompanied by a few additional standards. Students still focus on identifying media forms, techniques, and purposes, but are also taught to recognize and understand e-mails among other things. In grades three through five, the media texts students encounter become more complex and are studied on a more in-depth level. In grade four, students begin evaluating advertisements. They are to assess whether the impacts of various advertisements are positive or negative. They also study the influence of different design techniques used in the media. Grade five incorporates understanding various media forms and identifying the point-of-view in media pieces. In all of elementary school, there are no media production or “Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts” standards. In the revision process, the majority of experts and revision committee members agreed that media production was too advanced for elementary aged students (Texas Education Agency Division of Policy Coordination, 2010).



In my evaluation, the new elementary standards are more in depth than Viewing and Representing's were. Not only do they start much earlier (in kindergarten), they are also more detailed, and they begin to address the evaluation of advertisements. On the other hand, one advantage Viewing and Representing had was its inclusion of media production in the elementary standards. In my opinion, getting the valuable information of media literacy training to a younger audience outweighs the benefits of having them begin to produce media at a younger age. Media production is only one element of NCA's five criteria, and because it is included in later grades in the new program, students still receive media production standards in an adequate amount. In the long run, students do not miss the benefits of media creation. Starting media literacy training earlier in a child's life is beneficial, because children encounter media at a very early age and could be more vulnerable to its messages the younger they are (Croteau & Hoynes, 1997).

By the time students enter middle school (grades six through eight), they have a significant foundation of media literacy knowledge. In the sixth grade, students not only review previous skills taught in elementary school, but are also presented with more complex media literacy content as they learn to analyze persuasive techniques used in the media such as testimonials and the bandwagon effect. Media production also begins in the sixth grade (just two grades after Viewing and Representing's did) and continues throughout middle and high school. In the seventh grade, some of the material from previous grades is repeated, but again, more complex processes are added, such as finding and interpreting implicit messages found in various types of media and evaluating how different types of media influence different audiences. In the

eighth grade year, the material advances once more as students begin evaluating the role of media in framing events and shaping public opinion (Texas Education Agency Division of Policy Coordination, 2010).

In comparison to the new middle school standards, The Viewing and Representing TEKS were not as specific and contained less advanced content. In addition, the production standards of the Viewing and Representing TEKS were vague and did not mention what sort of projects students should engage in. The new media literacy content, on the other hand, has detailed multimedia production TEKS in each grade. Grades six and seven include making multimedia presentations that focus on the appropriate usage of texts and graphics, while grade eight changes the production focus to images and sound. By the time students reach high school, they have already received completely adequate training in media literacy per the NCA standards. Nevertheless, the new high school TEKS bring even more in-depth and quality media education to students.

In high school, the structure for classes and material differs. Instead of having set material to be introduced in set grades, the high school standards are organized into various classes and electives. There is English I, II, III, and IV (which are all required), as well as three media literacy electives that students can choose from. Students usually take English I in grade nine, English II in grade ten, and so on. The electives are less grade specific. This structuring of the standards was basically the same with Viewing and Representing, although the content differs (Texas Education Agency Division of Policy Coordination, 2010).

Throughout English I-IV, the media literacy topics are relatively similar. Change is seen in the clear progression of complexity as students move through the courses. In English I, students review and build on their understanding of visual and sound techniques, while also learning to compare and contrast different media coverage of the same events. In English II, this recognition of difference between various media sources progresses into recognition of bias and the effect messages have on an audience. Students also dive into the evaluation of competing social and cultural views presented in the media. The production element included in both English I and II involves students producing a multimedia presentation (via documentary, infomercial, etc.) that uses various techniques and is crafted for a specific audience (Texas Education Agency Division of Policy Coordination, 2010).

In English III, familiarity of media techniques progresses to evaluating the intersection of multi-layered media, social/cultural views, and bias. Media production skills build on the previous standards but add conveying multiple points of view to the multimedia presentation requirement. This production aspect remains the same in English IV. In fact, much of the content taught in English III is reiterated in English IV. The only significant progression is seen in the evaluation of an event or issue presented in various media forms and from various sources (Texas Education Agency Division of Policy Coordination, 2010).

The media literacy related electives are: an Independent Study in English, Analysis of Visual Media, and Media Literacy/Speech. These courses are usually optional for high school students. The Independent Study in English offers the least media literacy content and only offers a production oriented assignment containing

media literacy objectives. Students are advised to use a range of techniques to create a media text. The Analysis of Visual Media and Media Literacy/Speech courses both contain a lot of media literacy content, and are dedicated solely to media literacy related ends. The complete descriptions of each of these electives contain much detail and quality content. The basic goals of the Analysis of Visual Media elective are to evaluate the purpose of various types of media, to critique the impact of visual representation, and to hone media production skills. The primary goals of Media Literacy/Speech are for students to develop their skills in understanding, evaluating, using and producing media effectively. Although similar, the Media Literacy/Speech course covers more broad theoretical concepts while Analysis of Visual Media focuses on evaluating specific media texts. Both of these electives are aimed to teach students the impact media has on their participation in academic, social and democratic processes. Students are encouraged to examine the origins of their own tastes, preferences, voting decisions, and world views (Texas Education Agency Division of Policy Coordination, 2010).

When comparing the old and new media literacy programs in high school, they have much in common, although there are some differences worth mentioning. As seen in previous grades, the new program's content advances more quickly and delves into deeper subject matter than the previous program. For example, advertisements are analyzed in more detail, and the constitutive forces of media are explored in more detail. The old program included more specific production ends for grades ten, eleven and twelve, but the new program still conveys production standards that are on par with the NCA criteria.

Overall, when looking at the old and new programs side by side, differences are apparent, but both programs are clearly advanced (according to their standards). Both the old and new programs adequately address all five of the NCA competency statements for a media literate student and are therefore adequate programs. When planning this project, I assumed that because a separate strand no longer exists in the new standards, the new program was probably not as strong as Viewing and Representing. That assumption was not supported. The old media literacy standards were not removed, but were simply revised. In fact, the new standards are more in depth, advance more quickly, are more specific, contain more opportunities to hone production skills overall, and begin four years earlier in a student's education. According to Sarah Crippen (interview, February 17, 2010), the director of English Language Arts Curriculum at the Texas Education Agency, the new standards are better, because they require a deeper level of thinking and skills, are more grade level specific, are written more clearly, and are expanded to include more grades.

In spite of all these gains, there is still one point that may be a drawback in the new program—the fact that media literacy is no longer a separate strand. With media literacy content in its own primary strand, teachers may have been more inclined to view the material as important and worthy of time and focus. In the new standards, media literacy content is included in larger strands that detail a host of other information that may compete for time in the classroom. On the other hand, Dr. Renee Hobbs (interview, February 17, 2010) mentioned that the incorporation of media literacy training into the primary strands could be a good sign. It has long been the goal of media literacy advocates to incorporate media literacy material seamlessly into overall literacy--for

media literacy to be seen as a natural part of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy. The move of media literacy training from a separate strand to incorporation with reading and writing (subjects that have a long history of being taught and supported in the school system) could be a sign that media literacy is gaining more credibility in the literacy arena and is on its way to seamless integration with overall literacy (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010).

While the old and new programs show some obvious differences, when analyzed overall, the essence of the original Viewing and Representing program was maintained and even improved in the new standards. But how does one know whether these excellent standards will be implemented properly? It is one thing to have adequate state standards, and quite another to ensure adequate implementation at the individual classroom level. The next section will discuss the implementation and assessment of media literacy training in Texas.

#### Implementation of Media Literacy Training in Texas

Texas has excellent state media literacy standards, but what happens after those standards are released and implemented in individual schools? Do teachers understand the material? Do they teach it well? Are there enforcement tactics in place to ensure proper implementation? The standards are different from the actual curriculum that is created and taught to Texas students, and there can be a disconnect between the standards and their implementation in schools. This section will address both implementation and assessment plans as they have progressed chronologically. These plans do not change in conjunction with the changing standards. For that reason, the

implementation and enforcement of both the old and new media literacy programs will both be covered here.

There is an “official” plan for implementation that was reflected in both my interview with the Director of English Language Arts and Reading at the Texas Education Agency, Sarah Crippen, and in several online sources generated from the Texas Education Agency and other media literacy groups. Additional interview data revealed some challenges to implementation faced in Texas, which will also be addressed followed by a discussion of teacher accountability and student assessment.

After the Viewing and Representing standards were released in 1998, the Texas Education Agency began to receive feedback from teachers regarding the new standards. Some said they had not studied media literacy and were not confident on how to teach it (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010). As a result, programs were put in place to train teachers. This training came (and still comes) from two sources--the state and nonprofit agencies (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). The state system works with local universities and media literacy professionals to prepare materials and train teachers. A “train the trainers” approach is taken where a relatively limited number of people are given the training directly from the source, and those individuals in turn train many others. The training trickles down from the state to twenty regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) to 1,200 Texas school districts to the individual schools and teachers.

ESC’s work like training base camps. Teachers all over the state of Texas are invited to attend classes and receive training on new standards for curriculum. The ESCs are spread across the state to provide relatively local training to teachers. They

are funded primarily with state money, but many of them are also supported by their own fundraisers and entrepreneurial projects, as well as by fees charged to certain districts. Sometimes (when funding is available), representatives from the largest school districts are also invited to receive training from the state (D. Leveranz, interview, February 22, 2010).

Throughout the years, the basic state sponsored training structure has remained the same. The Texas Education Agency sponsors the creation of training materials and curriculum. Then multi-day training workshops for Educational Service Center consultants (and sometimes educator representatives from the largest districts) are designed and offered. District representatives often include curriculum directors and English language arts leaders. Once the ESC consultants and district representatives are trained, they return to the regions in Texas they serve. Once home, they turn their training around and offer workshops to local teachers. This way, training can be offered to teachers locally.

The workshops are free but not required for teachers to attend. At the workshops, teachers are given face-to-face training and materials such as videos and notebooks. Teachers are invited via fliers and announcements, and are often encouraged to attend by principals and other educational leaders. Although there is not a current record of the number of workshops given in Texas each year, some ESCs give as many as five to ten English language arts workshops every year. The exact attendance turnout for these workshops is also unknown, but Sarah Crippen (interview, February 17, 2010) describes it as an “overall good turnout.”



Developing the training materials and curriculum administered at these workshops has been a work in progress. Originally, the training was developed by The Center for Educator Development at the University of Texas, but was revised and updated by other groups in the years that followed. Due to a lack of funding, the Center for Educational Development at the University of Texas no longer exists, but the University of Texas has managed to stay involved in the training process. The University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts (UTCRLA), (which recently changed its name to the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts (VGC), was founded in 1996 with funding from the Texas Education Agency. Its purpose was to promote teacher development based on new state standards. In 2000, the UTCRLA developed a professional guide for the media literacy standards called, "Teaching the Viewing and Representing Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills in the English Language Arts Curriculum." The guide included curriculum development and training for teachers, and was accompanied by workshops. It was written by the UTCRLA with input from focus groups comprised of Texas educators (Crippen, 2008). The guide was made available to all teachers at no charge. Even if teachers did not attend the workshops to receive the training face-to-face, they could request the materials free of charge.

In 2002, a new curriculum package was developed. The Director of Special Projects at the Texas Education Agency initiated the move toward further professional development materials for teachers (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). With some additional grant money provided to the TEA for media literacy standard development, the agency combined its funds with the Texas Cable and Telecommunications Association and Discovery Communications Inc. to fund the new

research and materials. Because of Texas' large number of school districts and students therein, a partnership with the Texas Education Agency was favorable to media companies (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). Dr. Renee Hobbs was hired to help create the curriculum materials. Hobbs worked in conjunction with fifteen Texas teachers selected by the TEA. When they were finished with the writing process, the materials included training content with approximately 100 lesson plans (complete with video clips) that were made to incorporate into existing curriculum (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). The materials (including two notebooks and two videos of clips) were made available to teachers via Educational Service Centers. Teachers could attend a workshop for training at no cost, or just request the materials.

In addition to the materials and workshops sponsored by the state, nonprofit groups such as the Southwest Alternate Media Project (SWAMP) offered (and still offer) training workshops to local teachers and school district leaders (anonymous interview a, February 16, 2010). SWAMP is a thirty-two year old media arts organization that strives to increase appreciation and skills associated with film, video, and new media in its school district. As such, SWAMP holds training workshops and invites teachers from all over the state of Texas to attend. The workshops are generally all day for two days and offer notebooks containing curriculum guides and training materials. They are free to attend as the project receives funding from foundations including the Houston Endowment, Inc. and Houston Fine Arts.

Even with excellent standards and curriculum materials for teachers, thorough implementation can be a challenge. According to Sarah Crippen (interview, February 17, 2010), Texas law clearly states that the standards must be taught in each school.

Standards for education are not negotiable; teachers are responsible for adequately teaching students all of the standards. That being said, there is no monitoring system in place that oversees how standards are implemented. With 1,200 school districts, it would require large amounts of funding and resources to monitor each school's implementation. However, the end-of-term evaluation tests called the TAKS are aligned with the media literacy TEKS and provide an idea of how well the standards are being taught.

Although teachers are required by law to teach the standards, and they are held somewhat accountable via state tests, some experts question how well media literacy standards are being taught (anonymous interviews a & c, February 11 & 16, 2010). To her surprise, Hobbs (interview, February 17, 2010) found that many of the teachers she spoke with between 1998 and 2004 were not familiar with the media literacy standards or with media literacy in general. Another expert commented on the likelihood that every English language arts teacher interprets the standards differently (anonymous interview c, February 11, 2010). It is also likely that some teachers ignore the media literacy standards in favor of material closer to their comfort zones (anonymous interview c, February 11, 2010). For this reason, some curriculum materials were developed to appeal to teachers' comfort zones. For example, many English teachers favor fiction over nonfiction texts, so Hobbs (interview, February 17, 2010) came up with a program called "Reading the Romance" where teachers were able to teach media literacy using fictional entertainment texts. While catering the curriculum materials to teachers may help to a degree, it doesn't solve implementation challenges altogether.

Another challenge facing the proper implementation of media literacy standards is funding. Because many of the standards call on the use of technology like DVD players, projectors, and internet access, it is important that schools have these resources in the classroom (anonymous interview a, February 16, 2010). One expert commented that, from her perspective, the teachers favor the media literacy material but some of them are in need of adequate technology in their schools (anonymous interview a, February 16, 2010). The necessary media equipment would require additional district, state, or national funding. Even if teachers are using the training resources to learn media literacy, they may not have the technology needed for proper implementation in their classrooms (anonymous interview a, February 16, 2010).

In addition, many of the interview responses revealed that it is difficult to quantify or even thoroughly understand the extent to which the thousands of individual teachers seek out training and how they interpret the standards. Indeed, there is much variation at the individual teacher level. There is no guarantee that teachers attend the training offered to them as they are not required to spend several days in workshops learning the material. Teachers also vary in regard to which standards they emphasize in the classroom and the degree to which they themselves understand media literacy. Even though training is available to teachers, this does not guarantee adequate implementation. There is no system for monitoring exactly how teachers implement the standards inside their classrooms. The one measure that Texas has taken in enforcing implementation of the standards is in the form of state assessments. The next section will address these assessments in more detail.

### *State Assessment Tests for Media Literacy in Texas*

The only official standard enforcement in Texas is the state testing system. The Texas Assessments of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) are designed to measure retention of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). For more than twenty years, Texas has assessed how well the state standards are taught and learned via tests. These tests change along with state and federal statutes and changing standards. Currently, the TAKS assess reading standards in grades three through nine, writing standards in grades four and seven, and overall English language arts standards in high school (Texas Education Agency, 2010). This section will cover several topics: the importance of including the standards on state tests, what those tests involve, how they are scheduled to change in 2012, the effectiveness of Texas' media literacy programs, and whether the TAKS are thorough enough enforcement.

When legislation for the incorporation of media literacy training into state standards was first underway, advocates knew that unless the standards were included in a core subject, assuring the material would be on state tests could prove difficult. Texas teachers tend to focus on what is assessed on the end of term state tests. This is referred to as "teaching to the test." If a certain material is not included on the TAKS, the teacher can get away with not teaching it. In fact, some teachers interpret and learn the new standards based on how they are tested in the TAKS. In other words, some teachers go straight to the assessment guidelines and teach just what is needed for students to pass the tests (anonymous interview c, February 11, 2010). In addition, advocates knew that including media literacy training in the TAKS would encourage the state to provide training to teachers. If a state requires that students learn the material,

the state is more apt to ensure that teachers have training. Lastly, advocates reasoned that making the media literacy standards mandatory by including them on the TAKS could serve as an impetus for university programs to include media literacy training in their teacher certification programs (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010).

The advocates got their wish. Shortly after the new Viewing and Representing TEKS were released, the end-of-term tests were adjusted to include media literacy questions, and the tests still have media literacy questions today. The current TAKS test for the ability of a student to understand and analyze diverse media texts and visual representations. Students may be required to examine the function of various media forms, analyze persuasive techniques of media messages, and find the central idea of a message (Crippen, 2008). These questions usually appear in the form of an image or a text that a student must study and then answer related questions about. In one of the sample tests, three of the questions asked students to assess an advertisement (Hobbs, 2002). The level of difficulty and type of media related questions depend on the grade in which the test is given.

Even though students are given TAKS in many of the grades, they are only required to pass the TAKS in grades five and eight, and then after English IV (the end of high school) in order to move forward with their education. These benchmarks fall at the end of elementary, middle and high school and determine whether a student can advance to higher grades. Students are allowed to retake the test several times, but if they continue to fail, they must repeat the grade (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010).

The public records that disclose student results from the TAKS tests do not itemize student response according to each question or type of question. Therefore, the only data that can be publically accessed is the overall achievement in English language arts. The media literacy questions cannot be reviewed separately. Luckily, one of my interview participants, Sarah Crippen (the Director of English Language Arts Curriculum at the Texas Education Agency), had access to this data and was able to give me a synopsis of how students are doing on the media literacy related questions (interview, February 17, 2010). Since 2003 when Crippen began working for the TEA, the scores for media literacy learning have done two things, both of which are positive. First, ever since media literacy training was included in English language arts, the overall English scores on the TAKS have gone up in all grades. In 1998, students had an 86.5% passing rate in the reading/English language arts end-of-term tests. In 2009, the passing rate had increased to 91%, and showed a steady increase each year from 1998. Even though this improvement could be attributed to many factors, it reflects positively on the media literacy program as it was one of the primary changes made to English state standards in those years (Hobbs, 2002). Second, in her assessment review meetings, Crippen saw itemized data for media literacy questions. She reports that students have gotten better at media literacy over the years and show good retention of the material as reflected by their media literacy state test scores. Overall, the Texas Education Agency is encouraged with the outcome of the media literacy TAKS questions.

The TAKS are scheduled to be revised in 2012. Although the changes are yet to be finalized, it is predicted that the new tests will include even more media literacy

questions. The overall revision procedure will probably call for increased teacher development as well (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010).

Even with the end-of-term state assessments, some experts have questioned whether more needs to be done in the form of standard enforcement. The TAKS give an idea of how well teachers are implementing the standards, but there is no way to know for sure (S. Crippen, interview, February 17, 2010). According to one interview participant, as of 2004, many teachers were still unfamiliar with the media literacy standards and even media literacy in general (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). Even though state assessments including media literacy related questions helps the implementation of media literacy standards, improvement to implementation would still be helpful. While students have shown retention of the information as well as steady improvement, teachers may still be able to get around thoroughly teaching all of the standards and only overview what will be tested on the state exams. The next section will look at the culmination of factors impacting Texas' media literacy program and convey some lessons for the field.

### Discussion

Using a combination of methods (legislative review, literature review and expert interviews), the story of Texas' media literacy training's start and evolution has been shared. A combination of influences ultimately impacted the start of media literacy training in Texas' standards. Several influences were of particular impetus: (1) a grant aimed at encouraging standards that facilitate 21<sup>st</sup> century readiness, (2) national standard suggestions including media literacy material, (3) teachers who supported media literacy on the standard proposal committee, and (4) student testimonies



presented to the State Board of Education. With these influences, media literacy training was included as its own strand in the 1998 Texas standards and also included on the state assessment tests.

Due to a routine standards update, the Viewing and Representing program was changed in 2008. It is no longer a primary strand in English, but is incorporated with existing English strands--specifically reading and writing. Although media literacy training no longer has its own strand, the program has improved overall. It is now included four grades earlier and communicates more in depth analytical and creative skills. Implementation of the standards is similar for both the old and new programs. Teacher training comes in the form of workshops offered by both the state and nonprofit agencies. With this information, there are several lessons for the field that can be drawn from Texas' story including what helped start the program, implementation and assessment issues, funding challenges, and college training for teachers.

First of all, what helped Texas start the program? Money coming from a federal grant was beneficial in starting the research needed to create the new program. This particular grant called for innovative standards for teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Pursuing grants and gaining financial support is a worthwhile goal for states seeking to improve their media literacy programs, particularly those grants aimed at preparing students for their digital and media saturated world.

Much of the support for media literacy in Texas began as a grassroots movement. This advocacy came in several forms. First, the artist-in-residence program enabled a media literacy advocate (Deborah Leveranz) to work with teachers in incorporating media literacy training. Those teachers in turn realized the benefits and

the ease of incorporating the curriculum. Some of these teachers went on to serve on the proposal committee charged with revising the English language arts standards. Second, media literacy experts and everyday advocates came to testify before the Board of Education in support of media literacy's inclusion in the standards. Even students came forward and spoke about their positive experience with the material. When individuals and organized groups are convinced that media literacy training is needed and helpful in public school education, media literacy's influence widens and the chance of being heard by standard decision makers increases (Considine, 2002). With this sort of influence, every voice can count. The more people joined to the cause of improving and increasing media literacy training across the U.S., the better.

The inclusion of media literacy material on the state assessment tests was particularly helpful in advancing media literacy as a subject worthy of focus in the minds of individual teachers. If at first teachers do not take the standard improvements seriously, two actions can be taken. First, states can include media literacy related questions on standardized assessment tests in order to increase concern for the material. These state tests can also act as an enforcement measure. Some of them determine whether students are able to advance to higher grades. To provide additional motivation, school districts and states could encourage positive test performance with increased funding for the school. Second, giving the media literacy program its own strand can be a step toward increasing teacher focus on the material.

While this case study reveals several positive steps that can be followed by other states, it also offers insight on potential challenges. Texas along with many other states could benefit from improving their standard implementation plans, funding, and teacher

certification. To begin with, implementation of the media literacy standards in Texas needs improvement. The interview data conveyed that many teachers do not attend the training workshops and some may not even be aware of the media literacy standards (R. Hobbs, interview, February 17, 2010). In order for a state to ensure that teachers are teaching each standard effectively, a monitoring system would be helpful in enforcing the standards. Funding for a monitoring system could prove difficult, but there are other means that may help in enforcing the standards. Increasing motivators (like money or certificates) for teachers to attend media literacy workshops could be helpful. Furthermore, programs testing teachers on their knowledge of media literacy material or making the state training workshops mandatory could help improve overall implementation.

Funding is another challenge that some Texas districts face. To function well, media literacy teachers need technological equipment in the classroom and available to students. Access to laptops, computers, and the internet is beneficial, along with access to a projector. Some interview participants mentioned the need to increase funding for technology in order to facilitate optimal media literacy instruction (D. Leveranz & anonymous interview a, February 22 & 16, 2010). States should encourage financing and technical equipment plans for their schools.

A final lesson for the field involves the college training process for teachers. Several of my interview participants commented that educator training at the university level is still lacking. The Texas State Board for Educator Certification (2002) states that future teachers are expected to know how to teach basic principles of media literacy and how to facilitate students creating pieces of media (State Board for Educator

Certification, 2010). The impetus seems to exist, at least in Texas, but colleges are slow in incorporating this training. Even the University of Texas (involved in the creation of the media literacy curriculum materials for public schools) does not require education majors to study media literacy, but simply offers the material as an elective (D. Leveranz, interview, February 22, 2010). In a survey conducted by Kubey and Baker (1999), it was revealed that very few colleges teach media literacy to education students. In fact, most of the colleges surveyed considered it adequate to require completion of a multimedia project or to demonstrate knowledge of how to show films in a classroom. Colleges are still behind in including media literacy training for their education majors. Requiring teachers to learn and be familiar with media literacy would not only help them teach it in the future but would decrease pressure on the state to train them. Taken together, these lessons and challenges can serve as guidance and a warning for other states as they seek to improve their own programs.

The inception of media literacy training in Texas was influenced by a combination of factors. State legislative action, federal grants, and advocate voices all influenced the decision to include media literacy in state standards over ten years ago. Although the original Viewing and Representing program was adequate, the recently revised media literacy program is even better. It begins earlier, includes more in-depth data and is more specific and succinct. However, implementation of these standards could use improvement. While state assessment tests help to ensure that students learn some measure of the media literacy standards, there is no guarantee that teachers are thoroughly implementing all of the standards. Texas' story offers several lessons on both what to follow and what to avoid that can be useful for other states in advancing

their programs. The concluding chapter that follows will summarize this work, examine the limitations of the study, and discuss implications for the future.

## CHAPTER 5.

### CONCLUSION

This project has brought us through several tiers of information, all building the case that (1) media literacy training is important for American students and (2) the United States' public education system today is deficient in this regard. The project began by showing the reader what media literacy is, why it is needed and how it has mitigated the negative potential outcomes of media viewing. This information attests to the fact that media literacy training is indeed important for American public school students. The assessment of media literacy programs across the country provides data supporting the claim that media literacy training is not only needed, but is lacking in the United States. In addition, the assessment chapter provides evidence of why Texas' case is of particular use in improving American media literacy programs across the country. The story of Texas' media literacy program reveals several lessons that may help other states advance their own programs. This concluding chapter will summarize the project, discuss its limitations and implications, and provide suggestions for future research.

Mediated messages are virtually inescapable in the United States (Piegeron, 2008). We find them on the sides of public buses, in the halls of public schools, in text messages delivered straight to cell phones, and in our entertainment texts like television shows and websites (Lemish, 2008). Because children will inevitably encounter thousands (if not millions) of mediated messages before they reach adulthood, it is imperative that they are taught how to discern the information contained in them. Furthermore, many of these mediated messages are persuasive subtly influencing

impressionable children on what to like and how to live. Sometimes the media transmits harmful messages including poor behavioral examples like smoking, promiscuity, and violence, and problematic social views like sexism and racism.

With these potentially harmful messages circulating in the lives and minds of American children, public school students need to be given the agency to think critically about them. This is the goal of media literacy training. Media literacy material should be offered in public schools in order to provide an equal opportunity for all students to access the valuable information. Numerous studies have been conducted suggesting the effectiveness of media literacy training when used to combat media related risks (Huesmann et al., 1983; Lumb, 2007; Wilksch & Wade, 2009).

In order for students to receive full and adequate training in media literacy and to obtain all of the tools necessary to skillfully interact in a media saturated world, there are several criteria that media literacy programs must meet. These criteria were originally given by the National Communication Association and outline five requirements for a complete and adequate media literacy program in grades kindergarten through twelve. In this project, they were used to evaluate K-12 public school media literacy programs throughout the United States in order to assess the country's current media literacy environment. The results show that while there have been significant improvements to nationwide media literacy training inclusion in the past ten years, and while there are some advanced programs, most state standards are inadequate and leave students ill prepared for their media saturated world. Various challenges exist that have inhibited and continue to complicate the inclusion of adequate media literacy standards in all of the states. They include: diverse geography, a lack of national education policy, a

heterogeneous population, a lack of motivation, a lack of training for educators, and policy making obstacles (Kubey, 1998; Kubey, 2003; Schwarz, 2005; Yates, 2004).

There is a definite range in quality of programs (as assessed by education standards) across the country. One of the most advanced programs is in Texas. Because of the advanced nature of Texas' media literacy program, it was researched in detail. Assessing how Texas started their advanced program over ten years ago and how the program functions (including challenges yet to be overcome) provides valuable information for researchers and policy makers seeking to improve the American media literacy environment.

As many researchers have reported on the importance of media literacy training and even the public school situation in the United States, this project was useful in providing new information to the field of media literacy that focuses not only on these issues but more importantly on solving them. While challenges are often addressed in existing research, how to overcome these challenges is not. This results in a gap in both the literature on public school media literacy programs and in the effort to improve the situation. Furthermore, the story of Texas' media literacy program (which provides these valuable suggestions for improving media literacy training in America) is one that has never been published in a complete form and contains important suggestions on how to overcome the opposition that states and advocates may face in instituting and improving media literacy programs. While performing the case study that led to these lessons, several limitations were encountered that will be discussed in the next section.



### Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations encountered while gathering data for this project. They lie in the case study research on Texas media literacy program revealed in chapter four. Several limitations surfaced during each of the methodological steps (literature review, legislative review, and interviews). In the review of literature pertaining to Texas' media literacy program, there was little information available. Several news stories were found, as well as several journal articles and a book chapter that mentioned Texas' advanced program. But these references were very limited. While the information was relatively useful, it was incomplete and revealed the need for more research on the program.

The review of legal documents and records in the legislative review offered far more information, but was still limited. There were some relevant private documents that I did not have access to. Several interview participants mentioned needing to find the personal notes they took while reviewing and meeting about the media literacy standards. Gathering and reviewing those notes would be beneficial. While I had access to the audio and agenda archives of all the State Board of Education meetings since 2004, accessing that data for the years leading up to 2004 would have been useful in relaying the story's start. In addition, there were no meeting minutes or audio archives available for some of the State Board of Education's smaller sub-committee meetings that took place after 2004. Those small meetings could have held valuable information regarding changes to the media literacy standards. There were also implementation and assessment records that I could not access. For example, the workshop agendas along with attendance records for state and nonprofit sponsored training workshops would

have been useful. One of the participants, Sarah Crippen (interview, February 17, 2010) had seen the line item scores for the state assessment tests. Although she did not know how to access an official record of this data, it would have been helpful to review those records.

The interviews also presented some limitations. Although the interviews were extremely helpful in providing information on the case that could not be found elsewhere, some of the participants' responses were based solely on memory. While some had notes and records in front of them while answering the questions, several mentioned their reliance on memory. Memory (while important when it is the only record), is fallible. While there were limitations to the methods used in this study, the data gathered provides a useful historical record and example for states desiring to improve their media literacy standards. The next section will discuss the implications and remaining challenges revealed throughout the research.

#### Remaining Challenges and Implications for the Advancement of Media Literacy Training

Throughout the research, several challenges to the advancement of media literacy training were discussed. While absolute, fail-proof solutions have not been revealed, this body of research provides ideas and implications for how to combat these challenges. The next paragraphs will address challenges facing the field in conjunction with implications for solving these problems and advancing media literacy training across the country. The following topics will be addressed: the geographical size of the United States and educational legislation, national standard recommendations, the grassroots spread of media literacy awareness, implementation and assessment issues, college degree training for teachers, and lack of educational funding.

Even though media literacy training in the United States has improved significantly in the last ten years, the country is still trailing other English speaking countries. One of the reasons given for America's reluctance and difficulty in including media literacy is the geological size and number of states with legislative authority. In the 1980s, the national government instituted legislation that took a step toward more uniform national standards. For the first time, states were required to issue standards and assessment tests. This brought increased unity in education to the numerous diverse and self-governing districts and simplified the process of ensuring media literacy training for entire states. Even with this advancement, improvement of media literacy programs across the country requires individual influence and work in each state. Unifying this effort to one national decision (with national standards) could further simplify the process. This change may be on the horizon as education standards have become more unified and federally influenced over the years. The country went from having no state standards to having law-mandated state standards and assessments, and federal influence through funding. Following this trend, perhaps national standards are a possibility in the future.

Furthermore, the history of media literacy in the United States shows a steady advancement. Media literacy has gone from being a non-issue in the 1950s to included in every state's standards sixty years later. If this pattern continues, media literacy will advance even more in the years to come. Perhaps one day, adequate media literacy programs will become a requirement in every state's education system. The steps taken to unify standards and include media literacy training in the last sixty years show a steady advancement and provide hope for the future of media literacy.

The challenge of a lack of motivation for media literacy training in the United States (addressed in the challenges section) has dwindled in recent years. Other countries were thought to be more motivated to teach media literacy. This was because most of their media sources came from the United States, and media literacy material was needed in order to teach foreign students how to differentiate and discern the American cultural messages seen in their imported media (Kubey, 2003). As Americans, this particular motivation does not exactly exist, but there are plenty of other reasons to provide media literacy training to students. Behavioral and attitudinal risks are not necessarily culturally activated but exist for all viewers of media. Additionally, those with decisive and influential power (teachers, researchers, Board members, etc.) may be convinced that media literacy training is beneficial to students regardless of whether mediated messages are culturally relevant.

When it comes to the specifics of challenges facing Texas, there are several lessons for media literacy's future improvement. Some scholars have noted that an increased grassroots campaign teaching the benefits of media literacy training to all individuals of the community would be helpful (Considine, 2002; Kubey, 2003). The next paragraphs will address how a grassroots spread of awareness to Board of Education members, parents, teachers, and the general public could be beneficial. In the late 90s, the Texas Board of Education had to be convinced that media literacy training was necessary and helpful. Historically, there has been a trend favoring standards that lead to job readiness. While media literacy training does involve production and analytical skills that could help in a number of jobs, it is comprised of primarily theoretical material. In the case of Texas, it took the influence of experts, teachers and even students to

ultimately convince the Board of the usefulness of training in media literacy. Perhaps this process would be easier if state Education Agencies were better informed about media literacy to begin with.

Furthermore, there seems to be a breakdown when it comes to parent involvement in the standard making process. Parents could be a helpful source in encouraging legislation that supports media literacy. The case study on Texas revealed that those with the most voice and influence in this regard tend to be teachers, expert groups and State Board of Education members. Certainly, spreading the word to more of these individuals with influence can help them institute the material by increasing their familiarity with the information. In fact, a grassroots push to inform teachers about media literacy would be particularly useful, because it could help them understand and better institute the standards in their classrooms. But going a step further, perhaps involving more parent interaction and increasing media literacy awareness among parents would be helpful in the overall improvement of media literacy. If parents are familiar with the material, they may be more likely to not only petition policy makers, but also teach their children this valuable information at home.

Decision makers, parents, and teachers are not the only practical recipients of media literacy awareness. Increased information to the general public could also be useful. In the Texas standard revision process, public testimony regarding the standards was allowed. Any individual could make a case for media literacy training. In fact, students came forward and testified to the benefits of the media literacy material they had encountered. This testimony was particularly persuasive to the Texas Board of Education. Perhaps encouraging more student input in times of standard revision could

be helpful in other states. Overall, any sort of grassroots push toward increased media literacy awareness across the country (whether toward decision makers, parents, teachers, or the general public) is beneficial. As grassroots awareness spreads to more people, the country may become more unified in supporting media literacy efforts.

National standard recommendations also help to influence the country as a whole. According to Texas' story, as well as scholar input from several sources, it seems that these national standard recommendations--while not mandatory or even federally sponsored--are increasing in influence (Goulden, 1998; Tyner, 1998). Texas is looking more to the national recommendations, and other states may be as well. Working toward influencing the groups that publish these standards could be useful in advancing media literacy as a whole.

Another challenge that surfaced was that of standard implementation and assessment. While standards may be excellent, they do not necessarily translate into quality information presentation and sufficient implementation. Teachers already face the challenge of learning new material to teach; making room in their curriculum plans for new standards can add to this burden. With the introduction of media literacy material, it is important to ensure adequate teacher reception. While Texas does not have a monitoring system to keep track of how the standards are implemented, the state can appraise implementation via state assessment tests. In this regard, inclusion of media literacy items on state assessment tests may be useful across the country as a tool for enforcing some level of implementation. But there is certainly room for improvement. If training and curriculum guides are available to teachers in other states (as they are in Texas), providing an incentive for teachers to attend and use the guides

could be beneficial. As it stands in Texas, the workshops are free, but teachers are not paid for attending. While payment is a good motivator, it may not be a possibility due to lack of funding. If monetary incentive is not possible, teachers could be required to attend certain training when new or different standards are published. Either way, there would be more of an incentive for teachers to pursue the training resources. This step could help in overall implementation of the standards in any state.

Another issue revealed in the research is that of media literacy training in college degree programs. Many colleges do not offer media literacy training to their education majors (D. Leveranz, interview, February 22, 2010; Kubey & Baker, 1999; Schwarz, 2005). Including this training on the front end of teacher education would be a step toward increasing teacher awareness of media literacy as well as improving teacher implementation of media literacy standards.

The last issue raised in this project is that of funding. Every step toward advancing media literacy training in public school standards requires money. From standard review processes and training/curriculum development to ensuring technical equipment will be available to children, significant funding is required to update media literacy standards. In Texas, some schools lack adequate funds to purchase helpful technical equipment like projectors and laptops. One of the initial impetuses spurring Texas to begin media literacy training was a significant grant from the federal government. This money helped Texas to fund new standard research. Money set aside for the advancement and implementation of media literacy standards in American public schools would be a significant help for any state.

The Texas case study in conjunction with earlier chapters points toward potential challenges as well as solutions for the dissemination of media literacy training across the country. The field can use this information to better understand and advance the American media literacy situation, as well as to gain ideas for future research, which the next section will address in more detail.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Several ideas for future research surfaced while reviewing why media literacy is needed, the media literacy environment across the U.S., and the specifics of Texas' program. To begin with, data similar to what is presented in this case study could be helpful in improving the American media literacy situation. There are other programs with advanced standards that would be interesting to research and even compare with Texas' program. Perhaps other programs used similar means to incorporate media literacy, or perhaps they offer new methods for starting and implementing the standards. Case studies of poor media literacy programs would also be interesting as a point of comparison. Perhaps some states have tried to improve their media literacy programs but have failed. These examples could provide more lessons and recommendations to other states seeking to improve their media literacy standards.

Additionally, a duplicate of the study conducted here would be useful for comparison and validity purposes. Steps could be taken to further the research on Texas' media literacy program. Access to some of the documents not publically available (like the personal notes of those involved in the standard creation process, itemized data on the state assessment tests, etc.) would be helpful. Response from additional experts could be sought and compared with the responses given here. A



sister study researching individual teachers' experiences with implementation would be interesting. To do this, a representative sample of teachers from around the state would be needed. Then, information could be collected covering individual teacher experience with training resources and the new standards in general.

Questions regarding teacher degree training were raised in this study. It appears that many college degree programs may not be offering media literacy training (Schwarz, 2005). In an age where media literacy training is at least a small part of every state's standards, it is necessary to involve universities in the preparation of media literate teachers. Researching the question of which college education programs include media literacy training for their teachers and which do not would be useful in addressing this issue. Teacher training while in college is relevant to the advancement of media literacy programs in public schools across the United States.

In addition, more media effects research would be beneficial. Many of the studies reviewed in this project pertain to particular lessons designed to combat narrow and specific media related risks. A complete and adequate program should incorporate many of these smaller lessons. Research assessing the effectiveness of complete media literacy programs would be beneficial. Specifically researching the effects of the Texas media literacy program (or any complete state program) would be helpful as well. Assessing complete programs could offer more data to analyze factors like short and long term media literacy retention, the effectiveness of different types of interventions, and the effects of media literacy training on various age groups.

The National Communication Association's criteria for a complete and adequate program were used as a standard of measure in this study. Research focused on

evaluating these standards and possibly suggesting improvements to them would be another useful way to advance the field.

Finally, questions were raised in the first three chapters of this project that pertain to the current state of the country in regard to media literacy. While some information was provided, a more detailed map of media literacy programs across the United States would be helpful. Additionally, research looking at all of the influences triggering the recent increase in media literacy standards across the country could add to the field. While this study provides unique and valuable data to the conversation of media literacy's development in the United States, it also reveals further questions to be explored in the future. These suggestions include: similar case studies on media literacy programs across the country, a duplicate of the Texas case study, research on teacher degree training, additional media effects research, a further evaluation of the adequacy standards, and a more detailed map and assessment of media literacy programs across the country.

This concluding chapter has taken us through the summary of the project's story from arguments on why media literacy training is needed, effective and useful, to the fact that it is lacking in public school state standards. Texas' story provides several implications for improving media literacy training in public schools. Some challenges like increasing awareness to parents, teachers and policy makers, and improving implementation plans still exist and face not only Texas but perhaps other states as well. Possibilities for combating obstacles to the advancement of media literacy training across the country include: increased funding, increased grassroots media literacy awareness, influencing national standard recommendations, and student and advocate

testimonies to decision makers, among others. It is my hope that the research and implications contained in these chapters will further the field of media literacy and improve media literacy standards in public schools across the United States.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- A) What was your involvement with Viewing and Representing?
- B) Describe how/why Texas' "Viewing and Representing" program was started. Why did the State Board of Education include media literacy into the curriculum in the first place? What were the major influential factors (new national standard suggestions, presentations from media literacy research groups)?
- C) Please provide a brief summary/description of what the program entailed.
- D) Were there any assessments made to measure the effectiveness of the program? If so, how might I access that data, or was it effective?
- E) Do you agree with the recent policy change that took the Viewing and Representing program out of the primary four educational strands? Why or why not?
- F) Why, in your opinion, is it no longer a "primary strand" in Texas' public school curriculum?
- G) To what extent was "Viewing and Representing" changed in 2008?
- H) Do you think that media education is important and why?
- I) How were public school teachers introduced to and taught media literacy and the Viewing and Representing curriculum?
- J) Do you know or have an idea of how individual schools interpreted the Viewing and Representing standards? Did each school implement the material differently? Is there a record keeping system for what schools do with state standards, particularly with Viewing and Representing?

K) Was there initially any resistance from local school districts or schools toward Viewing and Representing? Did teachers and school administrators understand the material?

## APPENDIX B: NCA K-12 MEDIA LITERACY AND COMPETENCY STATEMENTS

I. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives.

Knowledge	Behaviors	Attitudes
1. Recognize the centrality of communication in human endeavors. 2. Recognize the importance of communication for educational practices. 3. Recognize the roles of culture and language in media practices. 4. Identify personal and public media practices. 5. Identify personal and public media content, forms, and products. 6. Analyze the historical and current ways in which media affect people's personal and public lives. 7. Analyze media ethical issues.	8. Access information in a variety of media forms. 9. Illustrate how people use media in their personal and public lives.	10. Are motivated to evaluate media and communication practices in terms of basic social values such as freedom, responsibility, privacy and public standards of decency.

II. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the complex relationships among audiences and media content.

Knowledge	Behaviors	Attitudes
1. Identify media forms, content, and products. 2. Recognize that media are open to multiple	7. Create standards to evaluate media content, forms, and products. 8. Illustrate how media	9. Are motivated to recognize the complex relationships among media content, forms, and

<p>interpretations.</p> <p>3. Explain how audience members interpret meanings.</p> <p>4. Describe how media practitioners determine the nature of audiences.</p> <p>5. Explain how media socialize people.</p> <p>6. Evaluate ideas and images in media with possible individual, social and cultural consequences.</p>	<p>content, forms, and audience interpretations are linked to viewing practices.</p>	<p>audience practices.</p>
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III. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts.

Knowledge	Behaviors	Attitudes
<p>1. Identify the production contexts of media content and products.</p> <p>2. Identify the social and cultural constraints on the production of media.</p> <p>3. Identify the social and cultural agencies that regulate media content and products.</p> <p>4. Evaluate the ideas and aesthetics in media content and products.</p>	<p>5. Demonstrate how media content and products are produced within social and cultural contexts.</p> <p>6. Demonstrate how social and cultural regulations affect media content and products.</p>	<p>7. Are motivated to examine the relationships among media content and products and the larger social and cultural contexts of their production.</p>

IV. Media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the commercial nature of media.

Knowledge	Behaviors	Attitudes
1. Explain how media organizations operate. 2. Identify the social and cultural agencies that regulate media organizations. 3. Compare media organizations to other social and cultural organizations.	4. Demonstrate the relationships between media organizations and media distribution practices.	5. Are motivated to analyze the historical and current ways in which media organizations operate in relationship to democratic processes.

V. Media literate communicators demonstrate ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences.

Knowledge	Behaviors	Attitudes
1. Identify suitable media to communicate for specific purposes and outcomes. 2. Identify the roles and responsibilities of media production teams. 3. Analyze their media work for technical and aesthetic strengths and weaknesses. 4. Recognize that their media work has individual, social, and ethical consequences. 5. Reflect upon how their media literacy work relates to events outside of school learning.	6. Practice multiple approaches to developing and presenting ideas. 7. Structure media messages to be presented in various media forms. 8. Assume accountability for the individual, social, and ethical outcomes of their work.	9. Are motivated to appreciate how their media literacy work enhances self expression, education, and career opportunities.

(National Communication Association, 1998).

## APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Dear Sir or Madam:

Dr. Renee Hobbs at Temple University suggested I contact you to gain more information on Texas' media literacy program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a case study I am conducting on Texas' media literacy program: Viewing and Representing. As my Master's thesis at Georgia State University, I am giving a detailed account of the Viewing and Representing program to be used (hopefully) as a model program for other states to follow. I believe that the program was advanced and overall, very good, and would like to know more details about how it got started, what it entailed, and why/how it was changed in 2008 (Dr. Hobbs gave me the idea for the research), and Dr. Mary Stuckey is advising the research.

To participate, I will need about 10-20 minutes of your time. You can respond via e-mail or by phone. Please let me know which you prefer. If you prefer a phone call, please let me know a good time to call. If email works best, please find the questions below. Thank you!!! Your help is greatly appreciated as I am only looking for information from "highly informed experts", which is you! 😊

Also, if you so prefer, your name will not be included in the research. I got IRB approval for the interviews, and there is a consent form attached to this email. If you want your name (or any identifying information) to be absent from the research, then you can give me your consent via email or verbally over the phone. If you will allow me



to use your name or title in my research, please sign the second page of the consent form where indicated and either email (scan), fax, or mail the form to me.

Thank You,

Ava Ward-Barnes

Student Researcher