Professional Resource:

An Introduction to Media Literacy (2008)

Mary Fuchs
Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, USA

Students across the country are being introduced to technology at a younger age in both informal and formal settings. School districts (that can afford to) are equipping elementary school students with iPads, Kindles, and other new digital tools to replace textbooks or lessons otherwise completed with pen and paper (*New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2011). As these students use more technology in their daily lives there is an increased need for media literacy education at both the primary and secondary school levels. Within schools this need begins with teachers who are charged with the responsibility to master different technologies, implement them in curricula, and keep abreast of their students' technological capabilities.

The question remains, however, how can teachers best learn to use these technologies? There is still a dearth of textbooks — both paper-based and digital — that are designed to help pre-service or continuing education teacher professionals become technologically proficient. Lori Moses's *An Introduction to Media Literacy* is a great start for helping such teachers.

Moses clearly and articulately organizes the textbook in a number of short and effective chapters. Each begins with a bulleted list of main points, a key concept, and question for the reader to keep in mind. This makes the task of reading about different types of media and the theoretical ideas surrounding media analyses easy to digest. The book itself is easy to handle, not large and cumbersome like other textbooks, and its pages are well designed to present the information in a variety of ways without confusing the reader.

Moses, who is trained in graphic design and teaches Visual and Performing Arts at Monroe Community College in New York, also effectively uses images to convey complicated media concepts. For example, Moses created the Color Wheel Model of Communication to "illustrate the many aspects of message creation and interpretation" (197). The wheel, introduced at the beginning of the book, initially appears in black and white with each part broken down and explained in detail. Moses mirrors the wheel graphic in her arrangement of the chapters and topics so that by her conclusion, the graphic becomes a facile reminder of the textbook's content and message.

In Chapter 1 ("What is Media Literacy?"), Moses introduces the topic of media literacy and argues the goal is to build "awareness for the characteristics of the media, the intent of its messages, the techniques used and its impact on society" (2). Moses does not stop at this broad goal, but also aims to empower people with the "ability to use critical thinking skills when consuming media" (2). She spends most of Chapter 2 ("Basic Communication Theory") describing the component parts of the Color Wheel before delving into how media messages are constructed, delivered, interpreted, and reinforced in Chapters 3 through 8.

Moses's greatest asset is her ability to take the theoretical aspects of media forms and explain them in terms that students at both the undergraduate and graduate level would understand. She ties Aristotelian concepts of rhetoric to advertising and media messaging in Chapter 4 ("The Component of Structure"). She uses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to show how companies craft messages based on the perceived needs of their audience in Chapter 5 ("The Component of Creative Language"). And she incorporates Jungian psychology to explore how individuals process media messages in Chapter 7 ("The Component of Message Processing"):

"Psychologists from Sigmund Freud to Carl Jung recognized that humans are creatures of habit and that there are not only patterns to our behavior but that we have preferential behaviors we rely on. We are, in short, predictable. These personality traits even influence the manner in which we interpret media messages" (170). Moses dexterously weaves these theories throughout the book. Her approach is reminiscent of other writing in the humanities; it is almost as if she understands technology as an artist appreciating another's work, albeit with different materials.

However, like many published works on media, the greatest weakness of *Introduction to Media Literacy*, is its time-sensitive nature. Moses is adept at explaining the rise of newspapers, radio, and television, but many of the media conglomerates mentioned, like Gannett and News Corporation, have either diminished significantly or grown since the book's publication in 2008. Moses has far fewer examples of new media and how individuals consume media products and messages today. She pays little attention to Apple, Facebook, or Google, the three current media giants, and dramatically underestimates the importance of social media (155). In effect, Moses fails to relate the significance of smartphones, tablet computers, or eReaders and their affect on society, to students already using these products. Understandably, Moses and her publisher may not have been able to predict the rise of such digital devices, but their choice to produce a paper-based textbook without a digital component does not further help their cause.

Nonetheless, Moses's book is a good resource for pre-service teachers unfamiliar with media literacy or interpreting media forms. The book serves as an effective guide for deconstructing and analyzing media especially for students immersed in a media-rich world at an early age. Throughout the textbook, Moses provides numerous examples of media messages, advertisements, and images to show how media has traditionally influenced daily life. Many of the exercises and questions included refer to these examples and require students to actively reflect on the readings and demonstrated ideas.

An Introduction to Media Literacy does not provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to become technologically proficient, nor does it better inform students about the most current technological innovations available at their fingertips. But Moses did not set out to achieve either of these goals. As she explains in the preface, Moses aimed to provide students with basic knowledge on a "variety of theories" and "to be more practical" in an approach to media literacy (11). She is successful in both cases. She gives students the basic tools to interpret media; from the way individuals construct its messages to the ways in which individuals interpret them. And undoubtedly, this is no easy feat.

An Introduction to Media Literacy would best serve students as a baseline of knowledge from which they could move on to become technologically proficient. Additionally, with these critical thinking skills students would be able to better analyze current media trends as well as understand the similarities and differences between new and traditional media. Moses's book is greatly needed for teaching pre-service teachers about media literacy and, in turn, providing better opportunities for students in public schools who are using media at an increasing rate.

References

Hu, Winnie. "Math that moves: Schools embrace the iPad." *New York Times*, January 4, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/education/05tablets.html?ref=education