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## The Pedagogy of Critical Enjoyment: Teaching and Reaching the Hearts and Minds of Adolescent Learners Through Media Literacy Education

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### Abstract

While there is consensus regarding the definition of media literacy, classroom-based studies of media literacy education in action are few and research that investigates how teachers implement media literacy in practice are needed, including information about why it is taught, what is taught, and how it is taught. Through a purposefully selected case of media literacy at the middle level, this study analyzes three veteran teachers' media literacy practice identifying critical enjoyment as a pioneering approach to media literacy education that moves beyond the purposes of protection, preparation, and appreciation.

*Keywords: media literacy, pedagogy, middle school, social-constructivist, critical enjoyment*

In an effort to address the ubiquity of media in young people's lives and prepare them to meet the challenges of navigating media in a digital world some teachers have employed media literacy education as an augmentation of traditional literacy skills (Tyner 1998). Media literacy education extends knowledge and skill competencies from reading and writing print texts to include analysis of texts in all forms. Media literacy is commonly defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in all forms (Hobbs 2010). In the United States, media literacy has become a popular subject in PreK-12 classrooms, after school programs, health initiatives, summer camps, and youth organizations (Martens 2010). Reports (Silverblatt et al. 2002) have indicated it can be an engaging entry for students into learning across many content areas.

While there is consensus regarding the definition of media literacy, implementation of media literacy across school districts in the United States has been slow with a variety of obstacles thwarting practice (Kubey 1998, Hobbs 2010). Existing research reveals variation in teachers' purposes, philosophies, and objectives (Hobbs 1998; Tyner 1998; Martens 2010) and vast disparities in institutional opportunities and constraints that impact practice (Hobbs 2003, Mihailidis 2008). With slow and scattered implementation, there is also limited scholarship of actual classroom practice. What is

known emerges from a collection of cases, including media literacy as part of classroom-based explorations in multiple literacies (Kist 2005), media literacy in a temporary, grant-funded arts program (Share 2002), and media literacy as an element of teacher-initiated, core content area practice that is largely dependent on school-to-school contexts in order to persist (Hobbs 2007; De Abreu 2008). In addition, studies have largely neglected to examine how teachers make media literacy education engaging or effective for student learning. Understanding the approaches and processes of teachers seeking to deliver a media literacy curriculum would be helpful in advancing effective pedagogy.

In this article, I report findings from a larger research study to provide insight into these gaps. Through close observation of three veteran teachers' media literacy practice in a purposeful case at the middle school level, I investigated the ways in which teachers make media literacy classes engaging and effective for students' learning. Results indicated what I term *critical enjoyment* as a pedagogical approach and student outcome that extends the historical purposes of media literacy for an adolescent population growing up in a digitally mediated world.

### Literature Review

Media literacy education in the United States historically arises from three main philosophies or

purposes that shape practice (Hobbs 1998; Considine and Haley 1999). Sometimes the goal of media literacy practice is to inoculate youth with a cognitive defense against the media in order to protect them from potentially harmful media messages and effects. The protectionist purpose often places the teacher in a role of ultimate power to interpret and deconstruct messages for students (Buckingham 1998). Critics of this approach argue that media messages are presented as dangerous, manipulative, or base and students are chastised as unsuspecting targets of media propaganda (Masterman and Mariet 1994; Considine 2000). This purpose denigrates students' associations and relationships with popular media and may promote media cynics instead of media critics or creators. While this approach is largely out of fashion in the pedagogical circles of media education outside the United States, protectionism continues to serve as an entryway for US practitioners in education and health fields that seek to safeguard children and teens from the harmful effects media may have on body image, sexual behavior, and substance use and abuse.

A second approach to media literacy seeks to develop or guide students' critical thinking abilities so as to prepare or empower them with a healthy skepticism so they might think carefully and critically about the media messages they encounter (Thoman and Jolls 2004; Alvermann, Moon and Hagood, 2009; Hobbs and Jensen 2009). The preparation or empowerment approach promotes teaching practices where students use principles of media literacy or key questions to investigate the constructed nature of media messages, including message purpose, codes and conventions, audience interpretations, and effects. Teachers primarily view students as active and complex audiences with developed media tastes and the ability to form discrete responses about the media (Buckingham 2003a). Some scholars debate the effectiveness of this approach suggesting that students may restate a teacher's suggested media views (Buckingham 2003a) or argue that this method is politically neutral and does not respond to media literacy education as an important social and cultural practice (Share 2002; Hobbs and Jensen 2009). Additionally, the preparation approach may include analysis and evaluation of media, but it may not provide opportunities for students to develop the media production skills that are reciprocal (Buckingham 2003a) to reading for complete literacy, such as writing or content creation, for example.

A third purpose of media literacy is to develop students' appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of media as popular art. Proponents of the media arts or appreciation approach contend that the pleasure (Considine and Haley 1999) students experience when engaged with and consuming media such as television programs and popular films outside of the classroom may also occur during activities in school (Hobbs 2007). In other words, because students like to use and consume entertainment media outside of class, they may be more motivated in school if classes integrate these types of media. Appreciation is sometimes developed further to incorporate the study of media codes, conventions, and creative structures as one does in the fine arts (Considine 2000) or to include media production opportunities (Share 2002). Yet, some scholars argue (Masterman and Mariet 1994) appreciation quite often is cleverly disguised protection because teaching efforts reflect an instructor's or the academy's tastes and values instead of privileging students' media preferences.

While each of these three philosophies or purposes are starting points to understand the approaches that inform teachers' media literacy education practice, they are not discrete and do not take into account the complexity or multiple dimensions of teachers' media literacy practices. Because there are few studies of teachers' pedagogy in school-based media literacy courses it difficult to know the extent to which media literacy is taught, if at all, and from what philosophical standpoint. In order to learn more about teachers' media literacy practice, this research study addressed the following questions:

- What do teachers include in the content of a media literacy curriculum?
- What pedagogy do teachers employ in the practice of media literacy education?

By investigating teachers' purposes and pedagogy in actively designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating a special media literacy course and curricula in practice, this study contributes to the body of descriptive, classroom-based research that is necessary for the maturation of media literacy education in the United States. This research is distinct from other studies of media literacy education (Share 2002; Kist 2005; Hobbs 2007; De Abreu 2008) because of its focus on teachers' pedagogy and on the intimate and complex relationships that exist between teachers' purposes, course design and practice, local

school and classroom contexts, and the nature and needs of adolescent learners.

## Methods

### *Research Setting*

This research presents findings from a purposefully selected case of media literacy practice at a PreK-8 school in an urban/suburban district bordering a large northeastern city. The case was selected because it was the only media literacy course conducted in a public, PreK-8 school within the research area (there was one other case identified at a small, private school in a surrounding city suburb). In addition to its inclusion within school-based practice in a public educational system, the course curriculum included both media analysis and production, making it an inclusive example of effective practice that reflected the reciprocal nature of literacy (Buckingham 2003a) and media literacy education as outlined by NAMLE's (2007) "Core Principles of Media Literacy in the United States."

Although the research population was small, consisting of three veteran teachers working with approximately forty students at one school, the case study approach was integral for answering the research questions and understanding "the contextual details of local practice" (Hobbs 2007, 14). By studying a purposefully selected case, I was able to spend time observing the class-by-class activities, interactions, decisions, challenges, and formative outcomes (e.g., students' discussions, activities, and homework assignments) of teachers' media literacy practice as they worked together implementing the curriculum, in conjunction with learning more about the school community and culture that supported a course in media literacy.

### *Course and Participants*

Three experienced teachers collaborated in teaching Media Literacy Workshop, which included an initial phase of media analysis and evaluation classes taught by two teachers and a follow-up video production project phase taught by a third teacher. This article reports data from the two teachers who collaborated in teaching the initial media literacy classes and who also co-authored the print media literacy curriculum document: Lisa, the school librarian, and Tamara, the visual arts teacher. Media Literacy Workshop began informally

around 2003 as an afterschool, volunteer class. Interested students could meet in the art room to eat popcorn, watch videos about media image and influence (e.g., Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly* series and titles from The Media Education Foundation), and discuss what they were watching with Tamara, Lisa, and periodic parent visitors. With support and encouragement from parents and a former principal, Media Literacy Workshop was woven into the school day curricula; first as part of an eighth grade English class (~2004) and later in the seventh grade health curriculum (~2009). Lisa and Tamara did not have formal training for teaching media literacy and learned about media literacy education largely on their own. Based on resources collected from The Center for Media Literacy, The Media Education Foundation, and The New Mexico Media Literacy Project, Lisa and Tamara developed the course, making decisions about what topics to include, what activities to do, what media and materials to use, and what assessments to employ in addition to co-teaching the classes.

In the present study, all seventh grade students took the Media Literacy Workshop as part of their regular school-day schedule of classes, meeting for a forty-five minute class period once per week. The seventh grade class consisted of forty students (ages 12-13) with a gender ratio of 23 males to 17 females. Students were divided into two sections of roughly twenty students each, for all of their classes, including Media Literacy Workshop. The students represented the overall demographic of the school, which included representation from more than twenty countries, multiple spoken languages, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, and a mostly middle-to-upper-class socio-economic population.

### *Data Collection*

The primary method of data collection in this study was field observations of Media Literacy Workshop class sessions, supplemented by audio recordings of classes and interviews with the teachers. Field observations included scripted and narrative details describing lesson structure, media and materials employed, activities, teacher/student comments, and reflective notes. Specifically, observations focused on how teachers introduced and interacted with topics, vocabulary, media viewings, activities, and students, in addition to noting the media and materials employed in

lessons. Observational data also focused on students' responses and reactions to media viewings, class activities, and comments in discussions, including scripted and narrative descriptions of student dialogue and discussion. After each observation event, raw field notes were re-examined with audio recordings in order to flesh out descriptive notes and refine dialogue. Raw field notes were also used to compile class-by-class summaries that detailed the purpose and process of each lesson and to write research memos that connected data with foundational and emerging questions.

A two-phase interview process with Lisa and Tamara provided an opportunity to triangulate observational data. The teacher interviews included an initial interview (I-1) in Fall 2010 and a follow-up interview (I-2) in Spring 2011. The purpose of the initial interview was to collect biographical data about each teacher, e.g. background, motivations, and experiences related to teaching and media literacy, and to learn more about the culture of the school and its students. The follow-up interview focused on learning more about each teacher's philosophy and teaching style and ideas about teaching media literacy. The follow-up interview also provided opportunities for teachers to reflect on how the media literacy classes were going, recall specific instances for discussion, and anticipate if and how the subsequent year's implementation might be modified.

Document analysis of the written media literacy curriculum, audio-visual media and materials, and students' completed homework assignments were gathered to enrich data collected from class observations and interviews and to develop a clear understanding of how course design and delivery was effective or engaging for students. The appendix provides an overview of the Media Literacy Workshop classes, including topics, activity summaries, media and materials employed, and homework assignments.

### *Data Analysis*

Collected data were analyzed using grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss 1967) through which I interacted with data as it was collected, actively reflecting on field observations, transcribed interviews, and documents, in conjunction with re-examining the research questions in order to attend to developing categories and refine intentionality in data collection. Through open coding, over fifty initial emic and etic

categories were extracted from data. These were refined to approximately twenty substantive categories using constant comparative methods (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006). The constant comparative approach enabled me to respond to the complex and interconnected nature of teaching and learning, including teachers' motivations, course design and delivery, and students' responses. Patterns and commonalities in substantive categories pointed to what I have termed *critical enjoyment* as a core, theoretical category that represented the intersections between purpose, curriculum, pedagogy, and outcomes.

### **Findings**

This section presents the research findings that suggest critical enjoyment as both a purpose and pedagogy of teachers' media literacy practice and an outcome experienced by students. The data described in this section are from the initial media literacy classes with attention to teachers' purposes, course design and delivery, and pedagogy.

#### *Teachers' Motivations and Curricular Choices*

Lisa and Tamara began developing students' critical enjoyment by first establishing a classroom climate by sharing their experiences working with media and setting a foundation for mutual respect in media literacy studies and exploration. In the first class session they shared that their motivations for starting the course were based in prior career experience in advertising. Lisa was a commercial consultant and described how she once stood behind two-way glass, clipboard in hand, observing the reactions of prospective customers to new products. Tamara manipulated advertising proofs, pre-Photoshop, in New York City. Through their stories, they explicitly called students' attention to three key principles of media literacy that were referred to throughout the course: (1) all media are constructed; (2) media are constructed for a purpose; and (3) audiences negotiate meaning (Class 1, September 23, 2010). Lisa and Tamara emphasized that awareness of media construction, purposes, audiences, and effects is an important part of making choices as a critical consumer and citizen:

We're not saying this is bad. You need to know what products are available because you need things like shoes, but we want you to think

about the message. And remember, each person will think differently... we need to respect each other's opinions. Our goal is for you to think about the messages— just like I got behind the two-way mirror; you need to see behind the message. (Lisa, Class 1, September 23, 2010)

Lisa's explanation that students need to "see behind the message" included a call that students' also respect each other's ideas and opinions. She explained that there "was no right or wrong answer" and a mutual respect for audiences' interpretations and opinions was set as an essential expectation for discussing media in the Media Literacy Workshop.

A climate of critical enjoyment was furthered by curricular choices that reflected the media adolescent learners' were typically exposed to or that they could enjoy. Tamara explained that the curriculum purposefully focused on commercial media "because that is the arena that these kids are most heavily exposed to and respond to and think is cool" (Tamara, I-2, February 3, 2011). Commercial media was supplemented with popular media clips used to illustrate concepts or ideas. For example, Lisa and Tamara showed a short clip from *Wayne's World* where Wayne and Garth parody product placement:

[The students] think that the *Wayne's World* clip is just great—and they should because it is really funny. I think a great way to get at your point is to use some humor. Especially when you are talking about media, because it's theatre. (Tamara, I-2, February 3, 2011)

Tamara emphasized that humor makes learning fun, but more importantly it responds to the developmental level of seventh grade students, making it an essential teaching strategy for student-centered, media literacy instruction:

It's so important to understand exactly where kids are and what they are thinking and then to tap into that. In middle school they are really into humor. They are in the developmental phase of the 'fart joke.' That's exactly where they are and exactly where they're supposed to be. I think a good teacher knows that and taps into that because they're excited about it—and students love that and will respond to that. (Tamara, I-2, February 3, 2011)

The integration of popular media was not only imperative for Media Literacy Workshop, but also it was an instructional strategy for reaching adolescent learners through media literacy education.

### *An Evolving Media Language*

A principle motivation and component of teachers' media literacy practice was to help students develop a language or framework to talk about the media and their media experiences:

Nobody out there in the commercial media world wants the media slowed down and broken down and talked about, you know? So I think we're doing something that is really unnatural for media. We are slowing it down and talking about it. The goal is for kids to become critical viewers of media and in that, critical consumers. (Tamara, I-1, November 4, 2010)

Tamara continued by explaining:

Kids have a way to talk about literature. It is a part of how we educate children. But they never break it down or slow it down or talk about it for media. Media kind of just happens to you. (Tamara, I-1, November 4, 2010)

While they implemented vocabulary acquisition as a key component of practice, Lisa and Tamara were not static in this area and the language students developed was largely self-constructed and evolving. Lisa and Tamara began with vocabulary that was catchy and playful in a lesson on advertising techniques (e.g., "snob appeal" and "celebrity endorsement"). More challenging concepts were also introduced (e.g., "aspirational age," "objectification," and "cultural homogenization"). Lisa reported that learning vocabulary was not as important as giving students a chance to label media techniques or describe their thinking during deconstructions:

I don't know if there's a right list of terms. I think it's that you can see something, you can label it something, and then say, "Oh, now I see it here again." There's that ability, and once you've got that in place, they're pretty good at coming up with their own generic terms. (Lisa, I-2, February 10, 2011)

Lisa's perspective that the vocabulary students learned could be fluid and responsive to the meaning they made represented constructivist pedagogy and emerged as an important dimension of critical enjoyment because it focused on students' success and learning. Sometimes the terms were introduced before an activity, while at other times students and teachers collaborated to figure out what to call something in the midst of a media deconstruction.

*Active and Social Learning*

One of the first activities Lisa and Tamara structured for students was an advertising search-and-identify activity that required students to engage directly with the concept of labeling media and facilitated their entry into developing a greater understanding of the principle “all media are constructed.” Teachers began with a PowerPoint presentation of ads that illustrated a range of typical persuasive appeals (e.g. “star power,” “heartstrings,” and “weasel words”). Tamara ran the slides from her computer at the back of the classroom and Lisa described them at the front of the classroom, pointing out elements of each ad on the illuminated screen. During this process, they molded basic deconstruction and critical inquiry through their dialogue and banter with each other and with the students. After the slideshow, students applied their technique-hunting skills by going through a pile of magazines at their tables and tearing out ads that grabbed their attention. The magazines included fashion, news, sports, and nature genres targeting a range of ages, from teenage magazines (e.g. *Teen Vogue* and *Sports Illustrated*) to adult titles (e.g. *Glamour*, *Time*, *Wired Magazine* and *BusinessWeek*). A social-constructivist climate was evident in this activity as a shuffle of shiny pages and excited conversation was heard throughout the room. Lisa explained:

We did the magazine activity because it is a real, concrete, easy access, messy way that you can start and everyone has to look at something right away and you're in it—BANG—right away. That's really good. (Lisa, I-1, November 10, 2010)

Tamara shared her feeling that media literacy was a shared experience for students and it was important for students to be “in an environment listening to their peers and where they feel heard” (Tamara, I-1, November 4, 2010). The importance of the social aspect for effective media literacy learning was further emphasized by Lisa's reflections on the forces pushing schools to embrace online learning:

I often wonder if I made it partly an online class... how that would work. Like [students] would be watching clips at home and keep a log and then maybe if we did a discussion when they came to class... but, I don't know...[there is] something about the immediacy of talking about it as a group the minute you stop seeing it. (Lisa, I-2, February 10, 2011)

Teachers and students were active participants in media viewings with discussions as a contiguous and social part of the viewing process. Lisa and Tamara explained that setting up the media clips with previewing questions before viewing or telling students to pay attention at a certain time while the clip was playing were fundamental steps in practice and could make discussions more dynamic and fruitful. Lisa clarified that a clear task was essential if students were going to construct meaning between class experiences and viewings:

You're setting a question, aren't you? There's a task. There's a task to deconstruct. If you don't have a task then it's like, 'Here's a bunch of cool stuff. Let's look at this cool stuff.' (Lisa, I-1, November 10, 2010)

Providing opportunities for students to view and discuss media clips together in conjunction with a clear task or set of questions established the Media Literacy Workshop as both an intellectual and social pursuit.

*Flexible Instructional Roles*

During activities, Lisa and Tamara often stepped back from their instructional roles and let students make decisions about media. During the advertising activity a “hands-off” approach was not only observed but also noted in the printed media literacy curriculum guide's instructions for teachers: “Circulate around the room while students work. Resist the urge to get pulled into figuring out where ads go for students. Sometimes, students will come up with new categories of technique, and you can add those to the wall” (Media Literacy Curriculum document 2010, 9). In addition to providing the students with space to explore and sort advertising appeals, the teachers asked students to contribute to the list of appeals and descriptive terms for techniques before the activity began. Students in both classes came up with patriotism and a title tag for the student-generated classification was quickly posted along with the instructor-generated appeals. Occasionally teachers interjected, however it was unclear if instructor intervention was meant to refocus distracted students and/or facilitate student interaction. Field observations suggest a social-constructivist approach, as teachers were largely hands-off during group activities, allowing the students to enjoy the process of constructing their own meaning through social collaboration and discussion of magazine ads as cultural artifacts.

### Co-Learning and Student Voice

Lisa and Tamara invited students to share examples of media that they accessed outside of school that related to what they were learning in the course. They called this invitation “media moments” and it evolved as type of co-learning, with teachers learning about contemporary media examples from their students. The teachers encouraged students to explain and interpret the media messages examined in class, as they themselves understood it. Lisa reported that students’ enjoyment in the process of critically deconstructing media was essential for successful media literacy practice: “You want them to be almost like two people—the person enjoying the media and the person who’s like, here is what they are doing—that’s deconstructing (Lisa, I-1, November 10, 2010). Tamara echoed this belief: “We have to be really careful to not get up there and say: ‘This is all bad, this is all wrong,’ because it isn’t (Tamara, I-1, November 4, 2010). If, periodically, a teachers’ perspective was suggested or they made a value judgment about media, student voice remained salient in discussions. For instance, on “Male Day,” after students viewed selected clips from The Media Education Foundation’s (MEF) *Game Over*, Lisa asked the class: “Do shooter games have an effect on people? What do you think, based on your own knowledge?” The following dialogue between a student, Jeremy, and Tamara then transpired:

Jeremy: Well, I think there is basically a fine line between “yes” and “no.” As many people said, ‘If you hear a six year old screaming every single swear word that they know while playing *Grand Theft Auto*,’ then that’s one thing.

Tamara: So you think a young brain can be persuaded to act in anti-social ways if they are exposed to violent video games?

Jeremy: Well, no, no. I am thinking that really young kids maybe should be banned from it, but older kids like 12 or 13 year olds could have some more freedom. (Class 8, November 4, 2010)

The class went on to discuss at what age students should be permitted to play certain video games, and who might act as gatekeeper, e.g., the game company, retail seller, and/or parents. Although Tamara’s question was a leading question that revealed her opinions about violent video games, the student was able to disagree, sharing his alternate opinion that kids

younger than he might require protection. When asked about this event, Tamara described the reasons for this approach:

At that age—again it’s really a developmental thing—they’re all about rebelling against authority and their parents. That’s why I think media literacy is so important for us to teach in school, because we are not their parents. They can’t feel like we are adult drones trying to preach to them. As soon as they feel that, they’re going to want to rebel against that and they’re going to want to say, ‘Well, media doesn’t affect me that way.’ (Tamara, I-2, February 3, 2011)

The presence of co-learning and the preservation of students’ voice in teachers’ media literacy practice facilitated students’ enjoyment of media literacy class and their willingness to engage in dialogue, discussion, and deconstruct popular media. While teachers described these strategies as necessary for reaching adolescent learners, it was evident that this pedagogy was also important for teaching media literacy.

### Reflective Student Practice

Most classes were followed by a homework assignment that related to the class topic and required students to select a media text of their own choice to deconstruct according to the assignment prompt or questions (see appendix). Homework assignments were included in the course because they added an “individually reflective” element so that teachers could evaluate students’ learning outside of the social environment of the classroom and gain insight into how they were thinking about media. Lisa explained:

One of the most important things for kids in wrestling with media is to have the ability to talk back to it, to reflect on it, and say, ‘I think they’re doing this because...’ Or ‘I notice they did that because...’ which is why I insist on written homework. Because I think it is individually reflective of students’ thinking. (Lisa, I-2, February, 10, 2011)

Homework assignments mirrored class topics and reinforced the three key principles framed by the course requiring students to demonstrate their critical abilities in media deconstructions using a media text of their choice. For instance, students were assigned the following task after their third class:

Find an example of a product being placed in a movie or a TV show (example: *American*

*Idol*). In two or more paragraphs, answer the following questions:

1. What was the show/movie and what was the product?
2. Was the product's placement necessary to the plot of the story?
3. Was the story or format of the show or movie changed to accommodate the product?
4. What do you think came first, the product or the story? (Media Literacy Curriculum document 2010, 22)

Students' assignments employed a range of television programs and movies for analysis (e.g. *Teen Mom*, *The Colbert Report*, *American Idol*, *Project Runway*, *The Biggest Loser*, *The Office*, *The Simpsons*, and *Glee*). Students were not given explicit instructions of what evidence to provide in support of their ideas. This open structure was again constructivist and permitted responses to be student-driven and for teachers to gain insight into whether or not students were learning how to support their assertions with evidence. Examination of students' homework responses suggests they were successful in making evidence-based inferences that reflected the principle that "all media are constructed." For instance, the ability to "talk back" and reflect on media construction was seen in this students' response describing product placement of L'Oreal makeup in the television show *Project Runway*:

The product placement was not necessary to the show, however it was appropriate considering the show is about designing and makeup can be a key ingredient...It didn't really change the format of the show...but a few of the challenges involved L'Oreal makeup, so the producers cleverly turned the show into the product in a way... I think L'Oreal definitely came before *Project Runway*, since it is an old brand and *Project Runway* is a new show. It is funny to think about how maybe L'Oreal had a part in making the show. HmMMMM... (Maria, product placement homework response, October 13, 2010)

Based on coding of homework assignments, this response represents an average "bell-curve" response for the seventh grade students' media literacy homework. This student's response suggests that this individual understood the concept that "all media are constructed" and the underlying commercial purpose

of message construction, and was willing to examine more deeply the choices made in the show. Her response reveals a feeling of critical enjoyment with her musing ("it is funny to think about how maybe L'Oreal had a part in making the show. HmMMMM...") and reflected Tamara's hope that students might enjoy the process of deconstructing media and talking about their ideas with friends:

If I had a class like this in middle school, I would have been really tuned in and I would have been aware of and checking in, like 'Look! Oh there it is again!' And you could impress your friends. Talking about advertising could become part of the teenage vocabulary...that is exciting to me. (Tamara, I-1, November 4, 2010)

Tamara's excitement that the process of deconstructing media might become part of "the teenage vocabulary" and that students might "impress their friends" by analyzing advertising hints at the hope teachers had that students would translate media literacy evaluation habits and reflective practice to their social lives outside of school.

### Discussion and Implications

Critical enjoyment is seen in media literacy practice that extends beyond preparing students to analyze and evaluate media to include a focus on kindling students' satisfaction in the analytical, social, and expressive processes of media deconstruction in their own right. Here I elaborate on my findings that ground critical enjoyment by describing what it is and how it was observed in teachers' practice and represented by students' comments. I also expound on how critical enjoyment is different from other purposes and approaches in media literacy education, and discuss the implications of media literacy education that includes critical enjoyment in pedagogy to deepen the connection and fulfillment adolescent learners experience in school.

In terms of pedagogy, critical enjoyment was observed by teachers' efforts to create a classroom climate based in mutual learning, respect, and exploration and that responded to the nature of adolescent students by fostering opportunities for active and social learning in order to broaden students' experiences discussing media critically. Developing a language that was responsive to students and that they could in turn use to begin



discussing media was a vital element of practice. By keeping vocabulary flexible, teachers were able to give students more entryways to analyze media in addition to extending the sustainability of their curriculum because individual students and each year's incoming class could contribute their ideas or terms.

Students participated in purposeful and reflective media viewings in an educational setting with peers and teachers who valued their ideas and opinions. The integration of popular media was essential for successful practice and for creating connections between teens and school. As this student quotation reveals, students enjoyed their media literacy classes:

I like it cuz it relates to things that seem a lot more prominent in my life. Because a lot of kids don't really see how Science or Social Studies will relate to them, but everybody—almost all of us can relate to ads and movies and stuff like that. (Jenny, class discussion, December 17, 2010)

Yet, the inclusion of popular media did not in and of itself result in students' enjoyment of media literacy. In their practice, teachers were responsive to the needs and interests of the adolescent learners themselves and learning was socially constructed. Beyond merely motivating students through the inclusion of media viewings, teachers' pedagogy included opportunities for students to socialize, laugh, and share their formative ideas about the media.

While pre-determined media selections were needed to organize an efficient curriculum, the teachers included "media moments" which allowed students to have ownership of the developing curriculum by contributing media choices for integration into the course. This was one aspect of students' learning experience in media literacy class that was authentic and appreciated and, as one student reported, created learning opportunities that were relevant and not typically experienced in traditional courses:

You don't think about it as a class really. Cuz you know in math we learn, you know, it's equations. And in science, it's.... but in media literacy there's not really one thing you can learn about. There are so many things. (Samuel, class discussion, December 17, 2010)

Critical enjoyment in this case represents a departure from the historical approaches of protection, preparation, and appreciation by suggesting that students were gratified by the experience of analyzing,

evaluating, and sharing media and their ideas about media with teachers and peers in a school setting. While the teachers in this study disclosed that the media could have a harmful effect on developing children and teens, their actions during classes prioritized students' experiences and gave breathing room for them to develop their own understandings and explore the media on their own terms. Teachers were explicit in reporting that students would not learn anything if they felt preached at or if certain types of responses were coerced. The cynicism that could result from critically deconstructing media, even in preparation or empowerment approaches, was not acutely evident in this study. Even with the "tricks" students observed and described through their analysis of commercial media and profit motives, students were thoughtful about the purpose of media literacy, as exemplified by one student's remarks regarding product placement:

Well, when we were learning about product placement—I kind of liked that. Cuz it's kind of like questions that I ask myself, but I don't know if anybody else asks themselves this... Like, 'why is Coca Cola in this movie?' Or like, every time you see New York City you see the Empire State Building or something. (Julie, class discussion, December 17, 2010)

The feeling of enjoyment students experienced during school-based, critical thinking activities in the Media Literacy Workshop diverges slightly from the preparation approach by acknowledging the affective domain of learning. While there is potential for preparation efforts to respond to students' social-emotional needs, the tradition of key concepts, principles, and critical questions is aligned more with the cognitive realm and a focus on intellectual outcomes rather than on students' experiences of enjoyment. Conversely, the media appreciation or pleasure approach, while important for critical enjoyment, does not typically include critical questioning or deconstruction activities and media texts often represent previously deemed popular arts instead of student-selected media. While closely related to the historical purposes of media literacy preparation/empowerment and media arts/appreciation, critical enjoyment diverges from these perspectives by accentuating students' feelings during learning. In this way, critical enjoyment inverts purposes and pedagogy from a focus on external

content and outcomes to an attention on the internal experiences of students during media literacy learning. The experience of critical enjoyment is expressed by a student's reflective comment in her product placement homework assignment: "I feel that as long as we are aware, we can still enjoy the entertainment and think for ourselves" (Sophia, product placement homework response, October 13, 2010). Sophia's reflective words suggest that critical enjoyment provides the circumstance for critical awareness and analysis to coexist with pleasure and enjoyment in developing adolescents' media literacy habits. However, because the content and context of Media Literacy Workshop focused on younger learners, it is unclear to what extent critical enjoyment could serve media literacy education with older learners when studying issues of media representation such as pornography, hate speech, and racial stereotypes.

The concept of critical enjoyment I identified in this study reveals a fundamental expansion of historical approaches to suggest that teachers engage learners in media literacy education by engendering students' feelings of satisfaction when deconstructing media. Critical enjoyment has implications for media literacy teachers seeking to foster an engaging and social classroom climate and learning conducive to authentic, student-driven analysis, evaluation, expression, and life-long learning. By including both critical analysis and enjoyment through humor, active learning, social learning, and the integration of popular, student-selected media, critical enjoyment supports both the cognitive and affective domains in the learning process. Students who experience positive affective processes when engaged in school-based coursework will likely be more connected with their classes, as learning relates to their heads and their hearts. Also, as media literacy is aptly integrated across traditional content areas (Swaim 2002) and into standards-based curricula (e.g., English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science) media literacy education that includes critical enjoyment in these areas could develop students' satisfaction in other classes. For instance, critical enjoyment is transferrable to other content areas when teachers provide opportunities for learners to harness their own intellectual curiosity and derive satisfaction from learning via curricula that connect to and integrate multiple media texts. Lisa explained how various media texts might be integrated into Social Studies and Science:

I mean— there are so many ways to mess with this. You could look at current political cartoons, past political cartoons... You could look at the way evolution was portrayed in three different states in the news. You could take an event and look at the newscast from Fox, look at the newscast from CNN, look at the newscast from PBS... I mean there are so many different ways that you can bring this in. You don't have to stick with commercial media. (Lisa, I-1, November 10, 2010)

By purposefully integrating and analyzing media texts from multiple types of media (e.g., political cartoons, newscasts, popular film and music, blogs, tweets, etc.) in their classrooms, teachers across content areas can bring together curricula and students through media literacy education.

Despite the advantages of critical enjoyment to develop students' gratification in school, as pedagogy it faces many of the same challenges of media literacy education broadly. Semali (2003) argues that educational legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) disregards the role of media and technologies in school and society, contributing to their neglect in teaching and learning practice. In a climate of high stakes testing that overlooks digital media and technology, teachers are unlikely to make great efforts to integrate media literacy education since this instructional time is not evaluated or prioritized by state assessments. The teachers in this study acknowledged this challenge:

We kind of felt ourselves put in a position last year of having to answer the question: 'Well yeah, how *do* you meet the state standards?' That didn't feel good. And I have to say there is a lot of that going on right now. The big picture is being missed and everybody is just kind of worrying about aligning themselves to some standard. (Tamara, I-1, November 4, 2010)

NCLB may be an artifact of the past as states and educators move forward with the Common Core Standards, yet it remains unclear how the new national standards will support media literacy education or "the big picture" of what students need to know and be able to do for success in college, work, and society. The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association 2010) state:

...students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new. The need to conduct research and to produce and consume media is embedded into every aspect of today's curriculum. (<http://www.corestandards.org>)

While a focus on standards may give the appearance of a rigorous curriculum, the results of this research suggest that feeling a connection with school and satisfaction when learning is a prerequisite for students to achieve content area mastery. It remains an important instructional strategy and pedagogical approach for teachers implementing the Common Core State Standards to integrate multiple and diverse media texts through media literacy education that employs critical enjoyment in teaching and learning.

Media literacy education that prioritizes critical enjoyment in practice has the potential to revitalize school-based learning experiences for adolescent learners who struggle to find relevancy between their school-based courses and their interests and activities outside of school (Buckingham 2003b). The implications of critical enjoyment could extend outside of the classroom as the taste students acquire for analyzing, evaluating, and creating media may facilitate life long habits of critical thinking and civic engagement. As a pedagogical method, critical enjoyment connects students with the curriculum, with each other, with their teachers, and ultimately with school and society. The teachers in this study were exceptional in that they had prior experience in media-related professions and the opportunity to collaborate in teaching the Media Literacy Workshop. They were also veteran teachers with over forty years of combined classroom experience. However the driving force in their media literacy education practice was social-constructivist strategies and an emphasis on the nature of adolescent learners. As emerging classroom models, such as flipped classrooms and PreK-12 online opportunities, gain support and prominence in schools, it is important to recollect data that support social-constructivist educational experiences and the power of face-to-face dialogue, discussion, and debate for adolescent

learning and development. Likewise, as the Common Core State Standards are adopted and implemented, it is essential for practitioners to include and integrate print and nonprint informational and entertainment texts in teaching and learning activities that employ critical enjoyment through media literacy education.

### **Future Directions**

While single case studies of classroom practice are not generalizable, the results of this research contribute to a growing body of knowledge into classroom-based media literacy education that is helpful in advancing the field and developing future school-based media literacy curricula. Further studies might include cases of media literacy practice at middle schools in other districts and states, or cases of media literacy at elementary and high school levels. However, it would behoove the field to learn more about students' perceptions, experiences, and feelings regarding media literacy education to better understand what pedagogical approaches make media literacy education engaging and potentially more effective for students' learning. Likewise, metrics for evaluating media literacy skills acquisition are still needed, suggesting the value of mixed method studies that examine both pedagogy and outcomes (Hobbs and Frost 2003), in addition to studies that investigate if and how students are continuing to critically analyze, evaluate, or create media outside the classroom.

Irrespective of future methods and directions, in order for the field of media literacy education to advance in school-based settings, future studies should be grounded in descriptive school-based cases where collected data are representative of the rich contexts of daily classroom life. These glimpses into the realities of American schools remind us that innovations like media literacy education take time and a climate that nurtures their growth. Research highlighting the efforts of individual teachers working in close collaboration is essential in order to understand the opportunities, challenges, and areas of support necessary for media literacy education to grow in US schools.

## Appendix

The following outlines a summary of Media Literacy Workshop classes observed during the present case study (2010-2011) including: class, topic, summary of class activities, media and materials employed, and homework assigned. Each class was approximately forty-five minutes in length.

Topic	Activity Summary	Media	Homework
Introduction and Magazine Dissection	Teachers presented rationale for course, introducing media literacy concepts; advertising techniques slide show with print ad examples; students conducted magazine dissection in groups; class ended with a discussion of most frequently used techniques; print ad analysis homework was assigned.	Advertising Techniques PowerPoint  Magazines	“What’s the Message? Teenage Images in a Media-Soaked World”  Students chose one advertisement that featured kids their age and deconstructed it according to seven questions.  e.g. Who created this ad and why? What is the product or idea being sold in the ad? What kind of lifestyle is presented? What did you like or not like about this ad?
History of Advertising	Introduction to commercials; clip on history of advertising ( <i>Sell and Spin</i> ); brief discussion; Jean Kilbourne on advertising ( <i>Killing Us Softly</i> ); “Production Notes” viewed to model a sample deconstruction; deconstructing commercials homework was assigned.	<i>Sell and Spin: A History of Advertising</i> (1999)  <i>Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising’s Image of Women</i> (1999)  “Production Notes” for McDonald’s and Mars Candy	“What’s the Message Deconstructing Commercials”  Students chose one commercial and deconstructed it according to nine questions.  e.g. Who created this message and why? Who is the target audience? What is the subtext?
Product Placement	Teachers introduced concept of product placement; examples from print literature were provided; students discussed product placement they have seen in various media texts; five media clips were viewed to illustrate product placement; product placement homework was assigned.	<i>Wayne’s World</i> (1992)  <i>The Truman Show</i> (1998)  <i>Minority Report</i> (2002)  <i>Thank You For Smoking</i> (2005)  <i>30 Rock</i> “Verizon” clip (2007)	“Product Placement”  Students chose one of two subjects to write about (product placement or reality TV) and deconstructed it according to four questions.  e.g. What was the show/movie and what was the product? Was the product’s placement necessary to the plot of the story? What do you think came first, the product or the story?
Manufactured Celebrity	Teacher introduced topic and terms (publicity, public relations, and publicity stunts); class played activity “guess that stunt;” media viewing of clips related to manufactured celebrity; students created and marketed a celebrity icon in small groups; students shared their “stars” with the class; no homework.	<i>The Brady Bunch</i> “Johnny Bravo” clip (1973)  <i>Josie and The Pussycats</i> clip (2001)	No homework assigned.

Appendix  
(continued)

Topic	Activity Summary	Media	Homework
Who Owns What?	Teacher gave PowerPoint lecture presentation on the history of media-related legislation; teacher explained key vocabulary (info diversity, cultural homogenization, merger, and cross-marketing); students examined cartoons related to media industry in small groups; class discussed cartoons; lesson ended with a Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen promo used to illustrate concept of cross-ownership and cross marketing.	Media Law PowerPoint  Media Industry Cartoons  Olson Twins Promo	No homework assigned.
Merchants of Cool	Students viewed first 25 minutes of <i>Merchants of Cool</i> and took notes on handout; key terms included targeted marketing, teen marketing, teen market profile, youth marketing agency; students viewed second half in class 7; viewing was followed by class discussion focused on reactions to the film and clarifying key terms listed on handouts; teachers explained <i>Merchants of Cool</i> writing assignment was explained.	PBS <i>Frontline's Merchants of Cool</i> (2001)	<i>Merchants of Cool</i> Writing Assignment  Students were asked to respond to the documentary by addressing three questions in a paragraph response.  e.g. The filmmakers refer to what they call “a feedback loop,” wherein media outlets watch teens and reflect on them in programming; and teens in turn watch the media and imitate the media image of teens. What do you make of this? Have you observed the media imitating teens? Or teens imitating media? Why do you think the media does this? Why do teens? Draw on examples in the documentary and/or your own personal experience.
Male (Boy) Day	Teachers kicked off by reviewing concepts mook and macho from <i>Merchants of Cool</i> ; teachers showed PowerPoint slide show of images and ads portraying boys and men; students discussed while looking at images; class viewed three clips from <i>Game Over</i> ; class ended with a discussion regarding representation of boys and men in media versus boys and men in real life; no homework.	PowerPoint of media images of boys/men  <i>Game Over: Gender Race, and Violence in Video Games</i> (2000)  Selected clips: 1- “Play it Like a Man” 2- “Narrow Vision” 3- “Sim Violence”	No homework assigned.

Appendix  
(continued)

Topic	Activity Summary	Media	Homework
Female (Girl) Day	Teachers presented key vocabulary objectification and fragmentation; class generated list of stereotypes for boys and girls in small group and shared terms via “buzz” activity; class viewed four clips from <i>Killing Us Softly</i> and Dove Campaign; male and female stereotypes homework was assigned.	<p><i>Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising’s Image of Women</i> (1999)</p> <p>Selected clips:            1-“Fragmentation”            2-“Femininity, Appearance, and Slimness”            3-“Polarizing Feminine and Masculine”            4-“Process and Activism”</p> <p>The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty’s Evolution and True Colors (2006)</p>	<p>“Male and Female Stereotypes Homework”</p> <p>Students chose an advertisement from a magazine or newspaper that they thought showed a gender stereotype of either a male or female and deconstructed it according to four questions.</p> <p>e.g.. What is happening in the ad? Who is shown and what are they doing? If this ad had a thought bubble, what thought bubbles would appear over each character in the ad? What is the message underlying the image? What is the ad saying about men/boys or women/girls? Does this fit with what you know about the world? How is it accurate? With what do you disagree? Why do you think the advertiser is using this image?</p>
Empowerment Day	Teachers set up <i>The Story of Stuff</i> for viewing; viewing was followed by additional clips Buy Nothing Day & No Logo Day; students got into small groups to act out media terms learned throughout course (i.e. objectification, cross marketing, etc.); teachers pre-viewed final production project options.	<p>Annie Leonard’s <i>The Story of Stuff</i> (2007)</p> <p>Buy Nothing Day and No Logo Day videos from YouTube</p>	Students began planning video production project.

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