Media Literacy Education from Kindergarten to College: A Comparison of How Media Literacy Is Addressed across the Educational System

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Abstract

This study of media literacy education at all levels of the educational system considered faculty perceptions of student media literacy competencies, the extent to which media literacy is addressed in class, and the extent to which faculty members consider media literacy education to be important. Data suggest that despite the research and policy focus on media literacy at the K-12 level, educators reported addressing media literacy competencies most frequently within higher education. Results also suggested that training and experience, not youth or digital nativity, are the factors that lead to an interest in teaching about media literacy among faculty.

Keywords: media literacy education, K-12, high school-university collaboration

In today's world of omnipresent media, the relationship between people, technology, and the way in which messages are shared with the outside world has changed (Jenkins 2006, 2008). As traditional linguistic communication has been increasingly supplemented with new media, the concept of literacy has expanded beyond its traditional definition (Brown 1998) to include the wide range of competencies associated with mediated communication (Mackey 2002).

Educators and researchers have, over the course of recent decades, made strides to address these new educational needs (Semali 2000). Programs of media literacy education have been developed and have taken a variety of forms depending on the subject area, theoretical perspective, or level of the educational system with which they are affiliated. Similarly, many different definitions of media literacy have been proposed, both within the United States and internationally (Christ 2004; Fedorov 2003; Potter 2009, 2010). Yet, despite the divergence of perspectives, common ground can be found. In the United States, one widely accepted definition that was agreed upon at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (Aufderheide 1993) and adopted by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (2007) suggests that media literacy involves a set of competencies associated with accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating messages.

Each of these dimensions is important for a variety of reasons. Access competencies are necessary because an individual's ability to participate in media culture is predicated on her/his ability to first find and select appropriate media. As such, the development of media access competencies is a necessary component of overall media literacy (Kellner 2002; Maughan 2001). Next, the development of media analysis and evaluation competencies is often considered the central focus of media literacy education (Ashley et al. 2012; Hobbs 2010). In the process of developing these competencies, individuals learn about the language of media (Buckingham 1998), develop a better appreciation of the role of media in society (Hobbs 1998), and gain more control over how they are affected by media with which they interact (Buckingham 1993; Desmond 1997; Hobbs 1996; Lewis and Jhally 1998). Finally, as individuals learn to effectively communicate mediated messages, they come to a better understanding of the constructed nature of professional media (Hobbs 1998, 2007), and also develop the skill set needed to express themselves, have a voice in society (Livingstone 2004; Sefton-Greene 2006), and advocate for social causes (Aufderheide 1993). Building these skills, Semali (2003) wrote, moves "audiences from awareness to action, from passivity to engagement, from denial to acceptance of responsibility for what each of us can do… as participants in our media-dominated society" (275).

The "transformative" (Hobbs 2011, 30) nature of media literacy education has been recognized by a mix of scholars, social advocacy groups, governments, and intergovernmental organizations (Martinsson 2009),

and has even been identified as a "basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country of the world" by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (1999, 2). Not surprisingly, then, media literacy educational programs and research have both grown significantly (Hobbs 2005, 2011; Potter 2010).

Existing media literacy research has focused primarily on programs geared towards children and teenagers, especially at the K-12 level (Hobbs 1998; Mihailidis 2008a; Martens 2010). At this level, there has been measurable growth of media literacy-related coursework that is either addressed in unique classes, or incorporated into existing classes of an academic or vocational nature (Daunic 2011; Hobbs 2004; National Center for Education Statistics 2010). Further, formalized standards have been adopted. In the late 1990s, the National Communication Association (1998) developed media literacy standards for K-12 educators, and standards for K-12 media education have since been adopted in all fifty states (Heins and Cho 2003; Kubey and Baker 1999; Yates 2004).

However, much less is known regarding the extent to which media literacy is addressed within post-secondary higher education. What limited research has been done suggests that media literacy may be uncommon on college and university campuses. For instance, Stuhlman and Silverblatt (2007) found just 158 colleges and universities across the country reporting that they offer media literacy courses. Yet, such statistics may be deceiving because media literacy competencies are not only addressed in named media literacy courses; rather, associated competencies can also be addressed in an interdisciplinary fashion in a wide range of courses across the university-level curriculum (Ashlock 2011, 135-136). Thus, as Mihailidis (2008b) wrote, "More empirical evaluation of media literacy outcomes in the university is needed. Post-secondary media literacy has suffered from a substantial lack of empirical data" (11). Expanding this analysis beyond named programs to include an audit of all course content is difficult, though. One method is to analyze program requirements, syllabi, or course overviews. Yet, as Mihailidis (2008b) suggested, this can be a problematic and inadequate method. An alternate method involves surveying or interviewing instructors to determine what they actually teach about within their courses.

Further, studying media literacy education at any single level of the educational system presents only a partial picture, because many competencies associated with media literacy require sequential instruction that increases in detail and sophistication as students mature. As such, it is important to consider media literacy education across all levels of the educational system to determine the way in which media literacy competencies are, or are not, addressed as students progress through their educational careers. The gathering of such data can allow for better cooperation between the different levels of the educational system which, otherwise, tend to primarily operate independently and in isolation (Consortium for Policy Research in Education 2000; Kirst and Usdan 2009; Usdan 1969).

In an era in which a record number of high school graduates continue on to a college or university (National Center for Education Statistics 2012), collaboration between primary, secondary, and post-secondary education is increasingly necessary. Such collaboration can solve several problems; it can lessen the need for redundant or remedial coursework (Kirst and Venezia 2004), reduce the "blame game" that results when educators blame each other for their students' deficiencies (Maxwell 2010), and increase the emphasis on student achievement and the successful completion of educational programs (Callan 2009).

Thus, bearing in mind the importance of considering all levels of the educational system together, and the need to also consider the potential for media literacy coursework in all courses across the curriculum, this study considers the overall media literacy educational experience by surveying educators within the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels of education. Such a survey allows educators in all disciplines to identify ways in which they may be addressing any dimension of media literacy—including media access, media analysis and evaluation, or mediated message communication—within their courses.

Specifically, three research questions are addressed. The first question addresses educators' perceptions of student media literacy competencies: (RQ$_1$) To what extent do educators within the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels consider their students to be media literate?

Bearing in mind previous research (Schmidt 2012a), which suggests accurate university-level faculty perception of media literacy competencies and low levels of student media literacy competencies (Kennedy et al. 2008; Lenhart et al. 2010), the following prediction is made: (H$_1$) Educators at all levels will perceive low levels of media literacy competencies among their students.

The second question addresses the extent to

which faculty members teach about topics associated with media literacy in their classes: (RQ$_2$) To what extent do educators within the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels address media literacy competencies?

Because most scholarly attention and educational policy have focused on media literacy at the K-12 level, the following hypothesis is formed: (H$_2$) Educators at the K-12 level will address topics related to media literacy more frequently than educators at the post-secondary level.

The third question considers the extent to which faculty members perceive that it is important for media literacy to be addressed within the educational system: (RQ$_3$) To what extent do educators within the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels consider media literacy education to be important?

Again, because educators at the K-12 level are the focus of much media literacy attention, the following hypothesis is suggested: (H$_3$) Educators at the K-12 level will perceive media literacy as more important to address than educators at the post-secondary level.

Method

Participants

All participants were sampled from the faculty of an elementary school, middle school, high school, college, or university located within the same county in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This county was selected because of its socioeconomic diversity and mix of urban, suburban, and rural municipalities. After randomly selecting a mix of educational institutions, potential participants were selected at random from the published faculty directories of each institution. Of the 2,016 email invitations that were sent out, 277 participants completed the Web-based survey, indicating an acceptable 13.74% response rate (Schonlau et al. 2001). The mean age of participants was 42.07 years, the average participant had taught for 12.48 years, 61.0% (n = 169) were female, and 28.2% (n = 78) were male. The demographic characteristics of the sample were similar to the national average for teachers (National Center for Education Statistics 2009). While this sample is too small to reach definitive conclusions about the nation as a whole, data gathered from this sample is useful in two ways. First, it presents a helpful snapshot of how educators at all levels of the educational system deal with media literacy in one region. Second, because there are demographic similarities between this sample and the broader population of educators across the nation, data gathered within this study might lead to the

identification of trends that also exist in other locations, and that can be studied further in the future.

Measures

In this study, a 56-item Web-based questionnaire consisting of three categories of items was used to study faculty perceptions. The first category measured the extent to which participants perceive that students possess media literacy competencies. Items in the second category asked participants to report the extent to which they address any element of media literacy in their classes. The third category measured the extent to which participants consider it important to teach about media literacy-related topics. Each category included items related to the media access, analysis and evaluation, and mediated message communication dimensions of media literacy which are identified in the definition established by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (2007). These dimensions were operationalized as follows. Accessing media can be understood as involving the finding and selecting of informational or entertainment media (Wulff 1997). Media analysis and evaluation involves identifying the production techniques, target audience, message subtext, and assumed purpose (Hobbs 2004). Communicating messages involves creating and sharing mediated messages (Hobbs 2004; O'Brien 2005; Williams and Medoff 1997).

Responses were reported using a Likert-style scale, which ranged from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5). An open-response item was also included in each category, allowing participants the opportunity to write additional comments, elaborate on their earlier ratings, or suggest additional views or experiences.

A trial study (N = 22) was conducted at a four-year university that was located within a close geographic proximity to the institutions included in the sample. After revising questions to improve clarity, the questionnaire was distributed to participants in the study sample. To establish the reliability of the measure, the Cronbach's alpha test was used. Analysis during both the trial study and the study indicated that the measure had good internal consistency (α > .70). In the study (N = 277), items in the category that addressed perceived student competencies had an alpha coefficient of .862; items in the category that addressed the extent of media literacy education had an alpha coefficient of .908; items in the category that addressed the perceived importance of media literacy education had an alpha coefficient of .871.

Results

Perceived Student Media Literacy Competencies

Regarding the first research question, educators at all levels reported perceiving that students possess general media literacy competencies ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .97$). Yet, different perceptions emerged regarding specific competencies. Participants generally perceived that students are most competent regarding media access, less competent regarding mediated message communication, and least competent regarding media analysis (appendix 1). Specifically, participants reported that students can competently retrieve information on the Web ($M = 2.44$, $SD = .95$), find TV programming ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .66$), use a cell phone ($M = 1.22$, $SD = .45$), and use a video game console ($M = 1.29$, $SD = .54$). Participants had mixed reactions about student competencies regarding locating print materials ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.01$).

Regarding mediated message communication competencies, participants reported perceiving that students can competently film a video ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .91$) and create digital images or photographs ($M = 2.34$, $SD = .88$). Yet, participants reported mixed reactions regarding competencies associated with creating a Web page ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .89$), and writing material for print or online publication ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .86$). Similarly, there were mixed reactions regarding media analysis competencies related to analyzing TV content ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .90$), Web content ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .91$), advertising content ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .95$), and music content ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .97$).

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that there were no significant categorical differences regarding perceived student media literacy competencies at the $p < .05$ level between educators at different levels of the educational system. While post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that there were differences between certain groups of participants (elementary school teachers, high school teachers, and community college instructors) regarding certain individual competencies (locating print materials, creating a Web page, filming video, and analyzing music content), the very limited nature of these differences does not indicate the existence of a trend.

Yet, several demographic factors, including the age and teaching experience of the participants, were associated with the extent of perceived student media literacy competencies. A Pearson correlation (appendix 2, appendix 3) indicates that there is a correlation between participant age and perceptions of student competencies associated with overall media access ($r = .163$, $n = 237$, $p < .05$), finding TV programs ($r = .173$, $n = 218$, $p < .05$), cell phone use ($r = .243$, $n = 218$, $p < .01$), video game console use ($r = .162$, $n = 218$, $p < .05$), and creating digital images or photographs ($r = .212$, $n = 217$, $p < .01$).

Additionally, a Pearson correlation indicates that there is a correlation between years of teaching experience and perceptions of competencies associated with overall media access ($r = .187$, $n = 241$, $p < .01$), and cell phone use ($r = .237$, $n = 222$, $p < .01$). Such positive correlations suggest that older and more experienced educators are less likely to perceive that students possess media competencies than younger educators.

Open-Response Comments

A variety of themes were identified in the open-response comments provided by participants (appendix 4). Each theme was coded, and frequencies were determined. The most common theme addressed in comments was that "students have limited media competencies which are associated with very basic applications" ($f = 46$). Participant comments that addressed this theme frequently identified student use of cell phones and social networking Web sites. For instance, a fifty-three-year-old high school computer science teacher wrote, "u-tube [sic], facebook, games, cell phone use—they're not 'into' reading in depth much at all."

Other comments also suggested the limits of perceived student media literacy competencies. For instance, another frequently addressed theme was that "students possess media access competencies and are engaged in media access activities" ($f = 29$). Yet, many other faculty members suggested even more limited views of student competencies, and addressed the theme that "students do not possess media analysis competencies" ($f = 23$). For instance, a thirty-nine-year-old elementary school teacher wrote, "They misinterpret much of what is presented in the media that they use." Similarly, a thirty-six-year-old high school computer and information science teacher wrote, "Students extensively use/create social media with YouTube/Facebook but unable [sic] to analyze media for critical thinking and future implications."

Also expressing the limited view of student competencies, many addressed the theme that "students use media only for entertainment purposes" ($f = 23$). As one forty-year-old community college English

instructor wrote, "Students only use media for their own pleasure and entertainment. They pirate music; they look at visual images but they rarely read the content. Their critical thinking skills are poor; they are surface level thinkers and appreciate more superficial forms of media."

In contrast, just two participants addressed the theme that students possess well-rounded media literacy competencies. Among these was a thirty-one-year old English instructor at a four-year university who wrote, "They use it extensively. It is all around them and in actuality you can not [sic] be productive without it." Accordingly, the first hypothesis, which suggested comparably low ratings of student competencies by faculty members across all educational levels, was supported. Additionally, other previously unrecognized factors associated with perceptions of student media literacy competencies were identified.

Teaching about Media Literacy

Regarding the second research question, faculty participants on average reported that they do address media literacy competencies in their classes ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.08$), though there was a wide variation between the types of competencies that were addressed (appendix 5). Regarding media access competencies, participants on average reported that they teach about finding relevant information on the Web ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.04$), and locating print materials ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.05$). However, much less teaching was reported regarding finding TV programming ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .99$), using a cell phone ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .90$), or using a video game console ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .83$).

Regarding mediated message communication competencies, faculty participants reported little teaching about creating Web pages ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .97$), filming video ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.00$), creating digital images or photographs ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.16$), and writing material for publication ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.17$).

Regarding media analysis competencies, participants reported teaching about analyzing Web content ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.21$), but reported teaching less about analyzing TV content ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.17$), advertising content ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.16$), and music content ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.13$).

An ANOVA suggested that there were significant categorical differences between educators at different levels of the educational system regarding the extent to which media analysis and media literacy in general were addressed in class.

Regarding media analysis, there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in scores for participants from different educational levels: $F(4,213) = 9.93$, $p = .00$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for elementary school teachers ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .92$) was significantly different than the mean score for high school teachers ($M = 2.77$ $SD = .97$), community college instructors ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.25$), and four-year university instructors ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.25$). This indicated that elementary school teachers included less media analysis coursework in their classes than did educators at most other levels.

Four-year university instructors also had a significantly different mean score than elementary school, middle school ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.20$), and high school teachers, thus indicating that four-year university instructors included significantly more coursework associated with media analysis than did instructors at these other levels of the educational system. There were also no significant differences between educators from different educational levels regarding the extent to which they addressed writing for publication, showing that while writing may be taught, students at all levels are not being encouraged to share this writing with a larger audience.

Regarding media literacy education in general, there was again a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in scores for participants from different educational levels: $F(4,219) = 8.08$, $p = .00$. Specifically, there were significant differences between four-year university instructors ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 1.00$) and elementary school teachers ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .93$), middle school teachers ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.32$), high school teachers ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .89$), and community college instructors ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.04$). There were also significant differences between community college instructors and elementary school teachers. This suggests that instructors within higher education—and especially within four-year universities—are more likely to address media literacy competencies in their classes than are educators at any other level of the educational system.

In addition to differences associated with educational level, the age and years of teaching experience of participants are also associated with the extent to which media literacy in general is addressed. A Pearson correlation (appendix 2, appendix 3) indicates that there is a negative correlation between age and the extent of teaching about media literacy in general ($r =$

-.146, $n = 212$, $p < .05$), and between years of teaching experience and the extent of teaching about media literacy in general ($r = -.193$, $n = 218$, $p < .01$). This suggests that older and more experienced teachers are more likely to address media literacy within their classes.

Open-Response Comments

Again, various themes were identified in the open-response comments (appendix 6). The most common theme addressed in comments was that participants "teach about media analysis" ($f = 20$). For instance, a thirty-year-old community college psychology instructor wrote, "I have taught about critical thinking in relation to media and information found on the web and in print, but I have never taught about creating that media." Similarly, a thirty-nine-year-old high school physical education/kinesiology teacher wrote that she "discussed advertisment [sic] and how to read it. what [sic] messages are trying to be conveyed by the vendor."

However, media analysis was the only media topic that was commonly addressed in participant comments. The second most frequently addressed theme was that participants "do not teach about media" ($f = 17$) in class. As one forty-one-year-old elementary school teacher wrote, "We do not have time to teach about media. My classroom doesn't even have a smart board and computer time is used in [sic] completing classes on math and reading."

Another common theme was that participants suggested that they "use media in class as an instructional technology" ($f = 14$). For example, a forty-four-year-old high school English teacher wrote, "I use the internet for resources that support British Literature. I am a traditionalist."

Based on these data, the second hypothesis, which proposed that faculty members at the K-12 level would address media literacy most frequently, was not supported. In contrast, the very opposite was demonstrated by these data.

Perceived Importance of Media Literacy Education

Regarding the third research question (appendix 7), faculty members reported perceiving that it is important to teach about a wide variety of media literacy competencies ($M = 1.62$, $SD = .61$). Regarding media access competencies, participants on average reported that it is important to teach about accessing media in general ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .68$), finding information on the Web ($M = 1.28$, $SD = .47$), finding TV programming ($M = 2.82$, $SD = .99$), using a cell phone ($M = 2.60$, $SD =$

1.13), and locating print materials ($M = 1.31$, $SD = .46$). Participants did not report perceiving that it is important to teach about video game use ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .93$).

Participants considered it similarly important to teach about mediated message communication competencies related to creating a Web page ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .76$), filming a video ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .90$), creating digital images or photographs ($M = 2.16$, $SD = .76$), and writing material for publication ($M = 1.78$, $SD = .77$).

Finally, participants rated it as most important to teach about media analysis, which included analyzing TV content ($M = 1.95$, $SD = .84$), Web content ($M = 1.73$, $SD = .70$), advertising content ($M = 1.76$, $SD = .75$), and music content ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .89$).

This general support may reflect a self-selecting bias, as individuals who support media literacy education may have been more likely to respond to this survey. Nevertheless, ratings of support were not uniform, and several key differences did exist regarding the age and educational level of participants. First, regarding the importance of teaching about media analysis, there was a significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in scores for participants from different educational levels: $F(4,204) = 2.85$, $p = .02$. There were significant differences in mean scores between elementary school teachers ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .81$) and middle school teachers ($M = 1.40$, $SD = .56$).

In addition to differences associated with educational level, the age and years of teaching experience of participants are also associated with the extent to which media literacy is addressed. A Pearson correlation (appendix 2, appendix 3) indicates that there is a positive correlation between age and the perceived importance of teaching about finding information on the Web ($r = .171$, $n = 186$, $p < .05$), and between age and the perceived importance of teaching about locating print materials ($r = .169$, $n = 188$, $p < .05$). This suggests that older educators perceive that certain media access competencies are less important to address than do younger educators.

Open-Response Comments

Several themes related to the third research question were identified in the open-response comments (appendix 8). The most common theme that was addressed was that "it is important to teach about media literacy" ($f = 43$). One of the many participants who addressed this theme, a thirty-one-year-old high school social studies teacher, wrote,

I believe it is very important to teach about

media in college classes. College is where students tend to form their own opinions on issues and are preparing for the real world. Its [sic] important for students to understand how media can be biased in it [sic] delivery and the potential, harmful side effects of the use of media by students. It is also important for students to understand the many benefits that are gained through the use of media.

Similarly, a twenty-seven-year-old elementary school teacher wrote, "I think media courses could be a valuable component of a college course of study. Digital media, social media and the analyzation [sic] of media are very relevent [sic] topics to be discussed."

Another commonly addressed theme was that "it is important to teach about media analysis" ($f = 25$). For example, a forty-five-year-old elementary school teacher wrote, "Yes, this is important. College classes should address the higher order thinking skills of analyzing and deconstructing, as well as teach the 'harder' concepts of how to create media products."

On rare occasion, participants suggested the opposite view, and addressed the theme that "media literacy should not be taught" ($f = 2$). One fifty-four-year-old high school teacher wrote, "Well I don't want colleges to teach how to analyze media because overall they are quite liberal and give everything a liberal stance instead of just teaching how to analyze."

The final hypothesis, which suggested particularly strong support for media literacy education among K-12 educators, was also not supported. Despite the policy and research focus on earlier grades, these educators saw less value in media literacy education than did educators at the post-secondary level.

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, data suggest that educators at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels perceive that students possess limited media literacy competencies. The broad categorical agreement regarding student competencies adds weight to the growing body of research that has found that the digital nativity of students of the Net Generation is narrowly associated with only the most common media-related activities (Kennedy et al. 2008; Lenhart et al. 2010). Accordingly, this suggests that there is still a need to continue focusing on expanding efforts to help improve the media literacy competencies of students at all educational levels.

Regarding the second research question, data

suggest that not all levels of the educational system address media literacy to the same extent. Specifically, media literacy is most likely to be addressed in post-secondary higher education, and is less commonly taught in early grades. This finding suggests that even though formalized courses in media literacy are uncommon within higher education (Stuhlman and Silverblatt 2007), media literacy concepts are indeed being addressed across the curriculum in a much more widespread fashion than had been previously recognized. This may indicate that educators from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds are addressing some aspect of media literacy within their different classes. Or, because opportunities for team teaching and specialized instruction from media support or library professionals exist, there is a possibility that different educators might be teaming up with others to help students learn about media literacy competencies in class. The specific manner in which media literacy competencies are addressed remains unknown, thus warranting the need for future research.

Further, the finding that media literacy is infrequently addressed within early grades suggests that the special focus of advocacy groups, researchers (Daunic 2011; Hobbs 1998), and state regulators (Flores-Koulish 2005; Martens 2010; Yates 2004) on including media literacy coursework in compulsory education at the primary and secondary levels is important to continue.

Additionally, data demonstrate that older and more experienced faculty members teach about media literacy more often than younger and less experienced faculty members. This suggests that training and experience – and not the youth or digital nativity of educators – are the most significant factors associated with teaching about media literacy. This also shows that older faculty members may no longer be shying away from new media technologies in the manner that research in the past had suggested (Arafeh et al. 2002; Jukes and Dosaj 2006; Toledo 2007; Yates 1997).

It is also notable that there were no significant differences between educators from different educational levels regarding the extent to which writing for publication was addressed. While writing is likely being addressed across the educational system (Bazerman et al. 2005; Beach et al. 2012; Common Core State Standards Initiative 2010; Melzer 2003), educators are still only infrequently helping students to develop competencies that allow for sharing or publishing their written communication. This suggests

that many educators follow the traditional model of developing writing assignments for which the intended audience is very small, and usually limited to the instructor or fellow classmates (Melzer 2003), instead of taking advantage of new publishing opportunities involving blogging and wiki-based Web sites and encouraging students to become more actively engaged in the modern participative culture in which sharing media is important (Jenkins 2006; Levine 2008; Livingstone 2004; Mihailidis 2011; Pegrum 2011).

Finally, regarding the third research question, results suggest that faculty members at all levels of the educational system consider media literacy education to be important. Previous research has found that high school teachers (Hart 1998; Yates 1997) and four-year university professors (Schmidt 2012b) support media literacy education. This study confirms these previous findings, and suggests that this support is spread across all levels of the educational system, including elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, community colleges, and four-year universities.

Further, educators consider media analysis to be the single most important dimension of media literacy. The acknowledgement of the importance of media analysis competencies suggests that educators from a wide variety of disciplines have goals that are aligned with the body of media literacy scholarship, which asserts that analytical competencies should be the primary goal of media literacy educators (Martens 2010). These findings indicate that there is the potential for increased development and inclusion of new media literacy coursework.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study considered a sample of educators across all levels of the educational system. In order to make reasonable comparisons between participants at each level, the sample was limited to one geographic region; all participants came from educational institutions located within one county. This provided some benefits, yet also meant that other geographic regions were unrepresented. Such geographic differences may have a minimal impact on the policies of college and university-level educators, who base curricular decisions on national or international discipline-specific norms. Yet, because educational standards and teacher training requirements vary between states, the perspectives of K-12 educators may be very different in other locations. Future research might consider several counties located across the country.

Additionally, this study's findings suggest that media literacy is currently being addressed in a widespread and interdisciplinary fashion within post-secondary education. Further research might consider this in greater detail, and investigate more about the specific subjects and courses most often associated with post-secondary media literacy education. New research might also consider the specific nature of post-secondary media literacy coursework in order to better understand the type of expectations that the professorate holds regarding student media analysis competencies. Further, such research might build on existing measures of incoming freshman media literacy competencies (Ashley et al. 2012) to consider the extent to which exposure to university-level media literacy coursework leads to stronger media literacy competencies among college students.

Conclusion

Data from this study suggest that media literacy education has become a part of every level of the American educational system. Strong support for media literacy education exists among educators from kindergarten to college, and there is reason to believe that media literacy competencies are addressed in higher education at a greater extent than had previously been established. Notably, while media literacy courses are rare within higher education, interdisciplinary integration of media literacy coursework across the curriculum is occurring.

Yet, some challenges remain. Despite over-whelming support for media literacy education, younger educators and educators in early grades address media literacy competencies less frequently than do older educators or those who teach at higher levels. Accordingly, it is important to bridge this gap by increasing the availability of faculty training programs (Goetze et al. 2005). Such programs are especially important for younger and less experienced educators who are currently avoiding media literacy-related topics. Additionally, such training can also be integrated into pre-service teacher education programs that train the K-12 teachers of the future (Considine 2004; Schwarz 2001; Tyner 1991), and into graduate and doctoral programs that train future college instructors and professors. By taking such steps, and helping to improve the media literacy competencies of existing and future educators, it will be possible to help improve the educational system and meet the acknowledged need for media literacy education in today's classrooms.

Appendix 1: Perceptions of Student Media Literacy Competencies

Item	Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Community college	Four-year university	Average
Media access competencies	$M = 2.37$ $SD = .81$	$M = 2.56$ $SD = .93$	$M = 2.43$ $SD = .98$	$M = 2.52$ $SD = 1.00$	$M = 2.59$ $SD = 1.00$	$M = 2.47$ $SD = .94$
Mediated message communication competencies	$M = 3.31$ $SD = .94$	$M = 3.36$ $SD = .83$	$M = 3.06$ $SD = 1.00$	$M = 3.02$ $SD = .80$	$M = 3.09$ $SD = .92$	$M = 3.15$ $SD = .92$
Media analysis competencies	$M = 3.54$ $SD = .77$	$M = 3.80$ $SD = .86$	$M = 3.34$ $SD = .90$	$M = 3.33$ $SD = .89$	$M = 3.50$ $SD = 1.10$	$M = 3.46$ $SD = .89$
Overall media literacy competency	$M = 2.88$ $SD = .90$	$M = 2.94$ $SD = 1.01$	$M = 2.86$ $SD = .98$	$M = 2.89$ $SD = .99$	$M = 3.09$ $SD = 1.01$	$M = 2.91$ $SD = .97$

Appendix 2: Correlations between Age and Media Literacy Education

Items that correlated between age and media literacy education	r
Age and student media access competencies	.163*
Age and student finding TV programming competencies	.173*
Age and student cell phone competencies	.243**
Age and student video game competencies	.162*
Age and student digital image competencies	.212*
Age and extent teaching about media literacy competencies in general	-.146*
Age and extent teaching about media analysis	-.185**
Age and extent teaching about analyzing advertisements	-.154*
Age and importance of teaching about finding information on the web	.171*
Age and importance of teaching about locating print materials	.169*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Appendix 3: Correlations between Years Teaching and Media Literacy Education

Items that correlated between years teaching and media literacy education	*r*
Years teaching experience and student media access competencies	.187**
Years teaching experience and student cell phone competencies	.237**
Years teaching experience and extent teaching about media analysis	-.153*
Years teaching experience and extent teaching about media literacy competencies in general	-.193**
Years teaching experience and extent teaching about how to locate print materials	-.179*
Years teaching experience and extent teaching about writing for print or online publication	-.140*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Appendix 4: Perceived Student Competency Themes in Open-Response Comments

Theme	Frequency
Students have limited media competencies which are associated with very basic applications	46
Students possess media access competencies and are engaged in media access activities	29
Students do not possess media analysis competencies and are not engaged in media analysis activities	23
Students use media only for entertainment purposes	23
Students do not possess mediated message communication competencies and are not engaged in mediated message communication activities	13
Students have very limited or no media literacy competencies	8
Students engage in media-related activities only for class	7
Students possess mediated message communication competencies	6
Students possess well-rounded media literacy competencies	2
Students possess media analysis competencies	1
Students do not possess media access competencies and are not engaged in media access activities	1

Appendix 5: Extent of Teaching about Media Literacy

Item	Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Community college	Four-year university	Average
Media access teaching*	$M = 2.90$ $SD = 1.10$	$M = 2.59$ $SD = 1.20$	$M = 2.66$ $SD = .99$	$M = 2.32$ $SD = 1.15$	$M = 2.20$ $SD = 1.15$	$M = 2.59$ $SD = 1.10$
Mediated message communication teaching	$M = 3.69$ $SD = .97$	$M = 3.26$ $SD = 1.33$	$M = 3.12$ $SD = .99$	$M = 3.22$ $SD = 1.29$	$M = 2.99$ $SD = 1.31$	$M = 3.25$ $SD = 1.15$
Media analysis teaching*	$M = 3.51$ $SD = .92$	$M = 2.88$ $SD = 1.20$	$M = 2.96$ $SD = 1.10$	$M = 2.77$ $SD = .97$	$M = 2.00$ $SD = 1.25$	$M = 2.77$ $SD = 1.13$
Overall media literacy teaching	$M = 3.26$ $SD = .93$	$M = 2.79$ $SD = 1.32$	$M = 2.76$ $SD = .89$	$M = 2.41$ $SD = 1.04$	$M = 1.80$ $SD = 1.00$	$M = 2.71$ $SD = 1.08$

Appendix 6: Media Teaching Themes in Open-Response Comments

Theme	Frequency
I address analysis	20
I do not teach about media	17
I use media in class as an instructional technology	14
I do not know what others teach about	13
I address media access	12
I teach about topics which actually are not related to media literacy	12
I address mediated message communication	11
I teach about research using media	10
My school addresses in general	9
I address media literacy in general	4
I teach about computers	3
My school teaches about mediated message communication	2
My school teaches about research using media	2
My school teaches about media access	1
No one teaches media in my school	1

Appendix 7: Perceived Importance of Teaching about Media Literacy

Item	Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Community college	Four-year university	Average
Media access importance	$M = 1.74$ $SD = .64$	$M = 1.50$ $SD = .57$	$M = 1.79$ $SD = .61$	$M = 1.55$ $SD = .74$	$M = 1.68$ $SD = 1.00$	$M = 1.68$ $SD = .68$
Mediated message communication importance	$M = 1.97$ $SD = .78$	$M = 1.66$ $SD = .72$	$M = 1.94$ $SD = .65$	$M = 2.18$ $SD = .75$	$M = 2.11$ $SD = .87$	$M = 1.97$ $SD = .74$
Media analysis importance*	$M = 1.87$ $SD = .81$	$M = 1.40$ $SD = .56$	$M = 1.69$ $SD = .58$	$M = 1.48$ $SD = .55$	$M = 1.58$ $SD = .96$	$M = 1.63$ $SD = .67$
Overall media literacy importance	$M = 1.76$ $SD = .54$	$M = 1.43$ $SD = .56$	$M = 1.71$ $SD = .58$	$M = 1.48$ $SD = .55$	$M = 1.58$ $SD = .90$	$M = 1.62$ $SD = .61$

* Statistically significant difference between educational levels

Appendix 8: Perceived Importance of Media Literacy Education Themes in Open-Response Comments

Theme	Frequency
It is important to teach about media in general	43
It is important to teach about media analysis	25
It is important to teach about media access	7
It is important to teach about computer-based research	7
The extent to which media literacy should be addressed depends on the particular class, school, or curriculum	6
It is important to teach about mediated message communication	3
It is important to teach about technology, computers	3
It is not important to teach about media in general	2
Media should already have been addressed	1

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