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Media Now: A Historical Review of a Media Literacy Curriculum

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Abstract

The Elizabeth Thoman Archive at the Harrington School of Communication and Media, University of Rhode Island, has the last complete kit of one of the milestones in the early chronology of media literacy, the 1972 Media Now curriculum. This curriculum was the first of its kind, using self-contained lesson modules that were part of a larger series of kits, text references, and accompanying workbook. Its self-directed learning model gave students the opportunity to learn about the media, by doing, responding to, and reflecting on core concepts of media production. Using physical artifacts from the Media Now kit, historical documents, promotional materials, phone interviews with the founders and teachers of the curriculum, the authors were able to trace the development of Media Now from its historical and educational roots of the 1960s, to its full production, distribution, and training out of the facility at the Southwest Iowa Learning Resource Center (SILRC). The historical and educational impetus for creation of what started as a Title III innovation grant of the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act of 1965, matured to be a curriculum that was implemented in 600 schools across the U.S - a testament to both its need and its success. However, as times and politics changed, federal and local government cut funding for Media Now. As we reviewed its original approach to curriculum design and pedagogy, we found that the Media Now story calls for a new examination of the creative materials and techniques used in the 1970s, in light of the current need for media literacy education in and outside of the 21st century digital classroom.

Keywords: *media literacy, Media Now, media analysis, media production, curriculum design*

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Figure 1. A complete Media Now curriculum, showing the three boxes that comprised the kits, workbooks, and examples of particular lesson activities.

Introduction

“Media Now has more than achieved the goals laid out at the project’s inception and deserves the attention of every educator concerned with media instruction.” (Arthur Ballantine, President of the National Advisory Council introducing Media Now as the 1973 Educational Pacesetter Award)

The Media Now curriculum was designed in the late 1960’s at the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center (SILRC), and was created to teach media literacy skills to high school students in a single semester. The kit contained fifty individual packages and was divided into seven subject modules. Designed to engage students in independent, self-guided learning with media analysis and what at the time was called media awareness, the kits used diverse artifacts in media production. Its developer, Ron Curtis, combined Marshall McLuhan’s media theory with educational theories of John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, and the taxonomy of Benjamin Bloom (Curtis, 1975a). Curtis together with Bill Hohlfeld, a high school drama and speech teacher, were influenced by a combination of historical and political events, and technological changes, as well as the zeitgeist of the times. Educational reforms, like the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as well as the growing demand for alternative pedagogy were influential (Curtis, 1975b).

The curriculum, with its innovative artifacts, is a time capsule that has allowed us to see how media was taught in the 1970’s (Jensen, 2005). By learning about Media Now, we can connect to a background, which can help to promote media literacy for the 21st century students. Our research looked at the background, exigencies, and development of Media Now from a historical perspective. We transcribed phone calls with the founders and teachers who used the curriculum, teacher guide, dictionary, student books, the fifty packages of the Media Now kit, as well as reports from the SILRC research, and its marketing materials. Based on the artifacts located at the Thoman archive at the University of Rhode Island and conversations with Media Now faculty, we were

able to provide both a history for the creation of Media Now, in addition to a review of the curriculum’s design, objectives, and effect. The main voice in all these historical materials belonged to Ron Curtis, the founder, curriculum developer, and supervisor of Media Now. His grant proposals, newsletters, marketing brochures, and administrative correspondence, along with our phone interview with him, became the basis of the study. We were looking to find the significance of pedagogy and process to both the development and dissemination to current practices of media literacy education.

The Right Moment in History

“The time was ripe, people looking for something new and different that would capture their imagination and be a way to teach better.” (Bill Hohlfeld in Curtis, Hohlfeld, Jensen, and Thoman, 2013)

Looking at today’s political atmosphere, digital media effects, and the standardization of education with the advent of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the Media Now curriculum provides instructional strategies for media literacy education that are, after forty years, relevant and important. The process and story of Media Now is important to our current efforts to find best practices in the classroom to foster students to be critical thinkers as they use media, while also seeking funding and relevant State and Federal standards align accordingly. Acknowledging the relevance of Media Now from historical and educational perspective offers us an understanding of the whole process from incubation to assimilation of a nationally-funded curriculum; second, the nature of materials and pedagogy that can still be considered progressive and effective; and third, the roots of originality that may support contemporary innovation in media education classes with digital media.

Concerns about media effects and technology are not limited to current concerns with digital devices; these concerns were as compelling in the



Figure 2. Students practicing film production as part of the Media Now curriculum.

1960s as they are today. The increasing number of television sets in American households during the late 1960s, combined with the broadcast of the Vietnam conflict into American homes, created a concern about media and violence. This concern expressed by the then Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Robert Finch in 1969 was such that he commented that “by the time a child reaches kindergarten, he will have watched 5,000 hours of television” (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). In 1967, 87% of homes had television sets, and this number would jump to 90% by 1971 (Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972). In the context of more televisions, more viewing hours, and the type of information that American youth was viewing, it is little wonder that educators wanted to create a curriculum that would attempt to address the concerns stated by the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.

In addition, the political, social and cultural zeitgeist brought a “whole different wave of music, of entertainment, and of media oriented kinds of activities” (Jensen, 2104). Less satisfied with the status quo of society, and indeed the tensions in society, as well as the limited opportunities for future employment, youth presented a challenge to educators and schools. There was growing pressure in education toward the new, experimental, and the possible. Education was changing from older, established approaches to newer approaches of self

directed learning and individual learning models. Jill Jensen, Director of Media Now, reflecting on the social and historical influences of the times expressed that “[t]he Sixties gave that opportunity for a lot of people, a lot of organizations, a lot of structures to rethink what they were doing and come out in a different way, and schools were by no mean the only ones” (2014). Programs like President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and its social and educational programs, prompted attention to larger societal themes of possibility, change, and progress. The federal government created an educational initiative, the ESEA that enabled educators to harness, address, and advance youth while promoting possibility, change, progress, and innovation.

The first large-scale educational act of its kind, the ESEA federal grant program made diffusion of funds available throughout the country. These grants encouraged educators to experiment with creative approaches to education that valued and used innovation. The ESEA budgeted \$100 million dollars for use in 1966, and was specifically allocated for the improvement of the K-12 educational processes. The improvement was tied to the notion that the baby-boomer generation could no longer be assured of the jobs and stability that their parents knew (Jensen, 2014). The idea behind ESEA stemmed from the recognition that quality and innovation in public education was necessary for the continued growth of the U.S.

Authorized for five years, the act consisted of five directives, which ranged from expanding and improving library resources to increase cooperative educational research and improve state educational agencies. Title III of the Act, whereby each state could receive \$200,000 in funding, dealt with relating research to practice, through the support of supplementary centers' services. This was of particular interest to a mid-western largely rural state like Iowa, with large expanses of open country between each county's major populations, and where supplemental center services could be used to develop research and educational curricula. The

funding carried conditions and criteria: proposals had to supplement, not supplant current local educational programs. The locally distributed grants had to be broadly implemented and would have to phase in pilot programs and then phase out federal support, three years after inception of the pilots. It would take time, experimentation, and a push from the U.S. Vice President for Media Now to reap the benefits of the ESEA grants. But initially, it was the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center (SILRC) that proved to be the crucible of people and ideas that would get Media Now to its position as the first, federally funded media education curriculum.

The Right Location for Innovation

“We are gratified by the high degree of cooperation that has taken place here in Southwest Iowa.”
(Ransom W. Fisher, Red Oak Superintendent in Midland School newsletter 1968).



Figure 3. The SILRC building in Red Oak, IA

In addition to the federal push for innovations, the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) encouraged exemplary teachers to model their pedagogy for other teachers around the State. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare applied federal grants to fund special and innovative programs in rural areas (PACE report, 1968). The Department of Iowa School Teachers was also promoting best pedagogy practices with ISEA, and funded educators like the film teacher, Ron Curtis from Monticello High School, and drama and speech teacher, Bill Hohlfeld, from Mt. Ayr High School, to talk about their educational practices in special sessions statewide. In one of these sessions, the future head of SILRC, Bill Horner, a Red Oak

Community Junior High School teacher, met Curtis. Hohlfeld was aware of Curtis' instructional initiatives, and was able to use the special teachers network to meet and speak with Curtis. Both teachers' experience in teaching film, drama, and radio was considered innovative and appealed to the need of other teachers in Iowa.

While educators were attempting to teach an incipient form of media studies, our research into the Media Now archives revealed no reference to a concise, comprehensive, holistic program at the national or state level that existed to address the impact of media on youth. A survey from SILRC to 284 schools in Iowa was sent, asking for response to whether or not educators planned to offer media

courses at some point in their future. The responses were favorable, and indicated that teachers would teach media if they had the equipment and curriculum to do so (Curtis, et al, 2013). To this end, work on what would become the Media Now project began in earnest, as the SILRC pursued grant funding, shared resources and expertise in order to develop a kit that could be used in schools all around Iowa.

In the opening chapter of the 1970 grant application for Project Film Now, Curtis wrote: “Students and teachers need to be prepared to

evaluate and appreciate the proliferation of media activities that confront them in this technological age” (Curtis, 1970a). The result of the proposal was a 1970 Title III Grant from the Iowa Department of Education (Curtis, 1970a) which gave Curtis and his team the means to create a new curriculum at the home base of SILRC, called Project Film Now. Project Film Now focused its curriculum on film. However, in light of political changes, and concern about the kinds of children’s media consumption, Project Film Now soon became Media Now.

The Medium is The Message

“In the United States today, we have more than our share of nattering nabobs of negativism.”

(Spiro Agnew, US vice president 1969 in Lewis, 2010).



Figure 4. FCC Commissioner, Nicholas Johnson, and his two sons visit at SILRC printing Media Now Package. Ron Curtis is on the left.

The creators of Project Film Now initially created the program to address high school students’ reception, interpretation, and attitudes regarding motion pictures. Film Now creators were influenced by two founding theorist in what would later become the American media literacy movement. In order to explain the importance of film education, Curtis used quotes from Jerome Bruner, psychologist and educator whose theories about the importance of the symbolic decoding of visual and linguistic symbols in children was gaining traction. Project Film Now was also based on Marshall McLuhan’s groundbreaking works: *Understanding the Media* (1964) and *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (1967). In both, McLuhan discusses that the uniqueness of each medium needs to be taught in order to communicate better, and that specific characteristics of each medium must be

understood. He was concerned about people’s tendency to focus on the obviousness of a message – its content – without consideration of the medium by which the message gets delivered (1964, p. 25), and that people would merely consume media, without understanding the unique characteristics of the medium delivering the message.

This concern had found a compelling voice in McLuhan’s (1970) call for educators to pay attention to the pedagogy that is being used in school. He claimed that in order to prepare students for the future, teachers would need to use and understand media to teach about the media. As such, students needed to be aware of the meaning of the media around them, from a subject-matter lens. As participants in the global village, McLuhan called for a commitment from educators and students to understand different kinds of media by analyzing

them. This resonated with Project Film Now's efforts, but did not become part of the program's extension to visual and audio media until Curtis heard comments about the news media.

For ten years, mainly in the first half of the 1970s, Media Now offered an innovative curriculum. Prior to the implementation of Media Now, there were individual course and classes for film studies, radio studies, TV studies, journalism, and photography. According to Elizabeth Thoman (Curtis et al., 2013) until the creation of Media Now, no one had combined all the media into one comprehensive curriculum, as McLuhan advocated. Contemporaries like Father Culkin (Center for Understanding Media, The New School University, NY) and Sister Sullivan (Lilis H.S., Kansas City, MO) were teaching production, and a course in Reading, Massachusetts was addressing film interpretation, yet only Media Now had a structured, modular curriculum to help students acquire production skills that would help to better produce and analyze media messages.

Efforts to promote media understanding or awareness were certainly not embraced by Vice President Spiro Agnew in 1969. Agnew's now infamous comment about the news media as being "nattering nabobs of negativism," lashed out at what he and others increasingly interpreted as media being

negative in its presentation of news about the Vietnam War. Once Curtis and Hohlfeld heard Agnew's comments, they realized that focusing on film was not enough. Curtis and Hohlfeld decided to change the name of Project Film Now to Media Now, and wrote an open letter to the Vice President Agnew. In the letter, Curtis wrote:

The mass media will not go away - it will not be censored, and news commentators will never be objective. So again, I suggest we must prepare our fellow man to cope with the print, the picture, and the voices that will continue to bombard him with information. (Curtis, 1970b)

It was clear to Curtis, Hohlfeld and the SILRC staff that instructors and students would need a curriculum that addressed all forms of media as a message. What is now obvious to media educators was groundbreaking for Media Now. Their evidence-based curriculum development, student-centered instructional model, and national dissemination system can teach us how 21st century media literacy education can be implemented regionally, and nationally, to support students' critical analysis and wise consumption of digital media.

Design and Experiment

"Media Now started in the classroom; many of the exercises and projects included in the Media Now approach originated with teachers and students."

(Ron Curtis in promotional materials, n.d.)



Figure 5. Ron Curtis on the left demonstrating the rationale of Media Now.

What began as Project Film Now, analyzing and producing films in high school developed into Media Now's goal of understanding, analyzing, and making different media messages. The goals of Media Now, as stated throughout SILRC promotional materials were to "improve students' knowledge of mass media terminology and techniques; demonstrate increased media production abilities; decrease students' susceptibility to persuasion by the mass media; and increase their positive attitudes toward the media" (Curtis, 1977). Jensen added, "if you know how media products are produced, you, as a media producer...can understand how you can control the message" (Jensen, 2014).

Bill Hohlfeld's Mt. Ayr high school class was the place to explore what became the Media Now's fifty packages. His supportive administration allowed Hohlfeld to try different types of media and activities that he used in his drama and speech classes. One of the most influential materials to Media Now, besides McLuhan's books, was the magazine *Media & Messages*. Curtis recalled using Mark Phillips' quote from the 1962 issue: "Cut the crap, create a relaxed atmosphere, communicate with each other, share experiences, have some fun and the learning will take care of itself." Curtis added: "And it happened with Media Now" (Curtis, et al, 2013). Both Curtis and Hohlfeld remembered visiting and talking to incipient media literacy educators, Father James Culkin and Sister Bede Sullivan. Culkin and Sullivan were known to Curtis and Hohlfeld for their innovative ideas of presenting to K-12 students on media production. Still, Curtis and Hohlfeld were disappointed from the low amount of production and engagement by the students in Culkin and Sullivan's classes, and began to imagine what steps could be taken to make instruction about the media more in

line with what McLuhan and Phillips encouraged.

It became clear to the creators of Media Now that a curriculum would need to be created from fragments of what was tried in the classroom, and would have to extend to include audio as part of media instruction. The first part to be created was the dictionary of media terms. Curtis and Hohlfeld would come up with terms to include in the curriculum and Hohlfeld would take cards with the terms, test the definitions by his students' reaction to them. Another key member of the team was the graphic designer, who was in charge of Media Now distinctive look by using special fonts and colors influenced by the 1967 Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album, and the 1968 NBC popular television comedy program, *Laugh-In*. The graphic designer was crucial not only in providing an artistic theme, but was also beneficial in the development of a reference dictionary and other materials. As she worked on the design of the packages, she would ask Curtis and Hohlfeld to explain terms that were vague and this process helped to refine and then issue the dictionary of media terminology (Hohlfeld, 2014).

Once the graphic designer finished working on one of the fifty packages, Hohlfeld brought that packages into his class and tried the activity. The students worked with the assignment materials, and then Hohlfeld would go back to SILRC to work with Curtis on the small details, to make sure the assignments were well defined and had gone through Hohlfeld's "students test." As both recall, not much was changed after testing at Hohlfeld's class, other than the radio recording and the TV speaking modules that needed some adjustments (Curtis et al., 2013).

The Media Now Kit

"All the equipment, all the information that you needed was right there. You picked the one that you were the most interested in. You did that, completed that...a pretest at the beginning and a posttest at the end and that information was what the teacher used to grade or to evaluate the progress of the students."

(Jill Jensen, media director of Media Now in Jensen, 2014).



Figure 6. Different boxes and their content from the Media Now kit at the Thoman Archive, University of Rhode Island.

The years of research and testing culminated in fifty self-contained media lessons, organized into seven “modules” that were housed in three transportable cardboard containers. The curriculum was developed to be a self-directed, non-linear educational experience, and teacher roles allowed for various levels of interaction, direction, and evaluation. Hohlfeld explained: “The student laid out his [sic] own curriculum...he had a pattern that he wanted to follow, and so he would go through the packages that more or less fitted his pattern and desires and what he wanted to study” (Curtis, et al, 2013). The self-contained modules promoted independent learning: students would select the order in which they would complete a module before moving on to another one. This did not mean that student learning was not periodically assessed. Workbooks and guides used by students and teachers served as curricular map and assessment tool for instructors. Here, the innovative approach to direct and active learning addressed the need for engagement answered the growing concerns of educators and the student’s desire for a different way of learning.

The original curriculum consisted of three cardboard kits, designed to be lightweight and portable. The three kits had everything needed for the students to learn concepts in each one of the

seven modules, with the guidance of a student workbook, and teacher. Each module contained the rationale, instructions, and outcomes for the student as described in the teachers’ guide, the teachers’ book, and the students’ guide. The seven modules were: hardware, production, genre, evaluation, message interpretation, aesthetics, and presentation. Only the first and the last were planned to be taught in that sequence while the rest of the modules were Non-linear and students choose their own order of learning. These modules could contain materials for making a camera, information on creating lighting effect, cassettes to listen to, directions for developing film, lessons on how to act – whatever the focus of the module supporting the larger kit required.

Classroom study employed a media dictionary, 50 Learning Activity Packages (LAPS), Student Learning Activity Guides (SLAG) (lab manual), a Student Learning Activity Book (SLAB) (supplementary reading and activities), and a corresponding Teacher Activity Book (TAB). The Teacher Activity Book tied together all the components parts, offering philosophy, administrative approaches, and additional test and exercises. External equipment that did not accompany the kits, like cassette tape recorders, film projectors, film cameras, etc., were specified for use, and enabled hands-on experiences creating and

responding to media.

According to Ron Curtis, the approach to teaching the curriculum and its topics was open-ended, and course application differed between teachers (Curtis et al., 2013). Teachers' roles were interpreted subjectively, depending on the environment and topic being studied; progression through the curriculum could either be linear, or non-linear (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1973). The modules followed the framework of the curriculum, but did not impose on the teacher or the student a prescribed sequence of emphasis, other than the required completion of the first module: "Hardware." The "Teacher Activity Book" (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972) offers the clearest description of the Media Now curriculum. The 394-page document covers the history of the Media Now program, rationale, objectives and expected outcomes, pretests, post-tests, and other matters important for instruction. The accompanying "Student Learning Activity Guide" closely followed the teacher's book. Both books had color-coded sections that matched the modules'

theme.

The Hardware module covered how to use the media equipment needed for the rest of the modules. More than a simple hands-on section of the curriculum, the hardware module required students to familiarize themselves with all facets of the equipment used for the curriculum, projector, different type of cameras, light, tape recorder, and the different film reel and audio speed. For example, before a student could actually use a camera, she would first need to go through a pre-test where she would be asked to identify the different parts of the camera and then complete a hands-on activity to understand how to make a camera work, as seen in Figure 7. Students were then asked to draw the camera and explain the function of different parts. As an extra credit activity, students were able to create a camera from cardboard tubes (see Figure 8.). In order to proceed to the next module, students were asked to successfully complete the post-test that demonstrated their proficiency in operating all the media equipment.

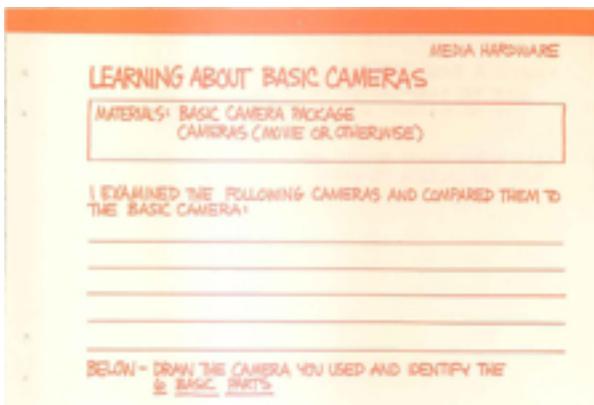


Figure 7. Hardware module activity in Student Learning Activity Guide, (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972, P. 29)



Figure 8. Build your own camera. Hardware module activity in Media Now kit, (SILRC, 1972)

The Production module started like all other modules, with a pre-test of students' attitudes and prior knowledge of production. Then students would practice basic shots, camera angles and lens. They would structure what Curtis and Hohlfeld called "movie sentences" and "movie paragraphs" in order to be able to structure a storyboard. This would lead the students to learn about narrative and 36 basic plot

structures that were described to them. Students would be asked to view several movies at home and write a viewing log to identify the basic plot structure. Eventually, students would come back to the class and write a script, visual description, special effects needs. The next activity would consist of the detailed practice of acting and speaking for performance on TV and radio. Figure 9a and 9b

shows two additional boxes that students could use to practice production with animation or special effects. The last part of the Production module covered editing. As seen in Figure 10a and

10b, each production team had to submit their plan while the left column would be for the instructor to grade their level of preparation.



Figure 9a and 9b. Special effects and animation Box. Production module in Media Now kit (SILRC, 1972)

 Two pages from a student learning activity guide. Figure 10a is titled 'MEDIA PRODUCTION' and contains 'GUIDELINES FOR MEDIA PRODUCTION' and a 'PURPOSE / WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO WITH THIS PRODUCTION?' section with a 1-5 scale and a list of goals like 'INFORM', 'ENTERTAIN', and 'CAUSE ACTION'. It also includes a 'TARGET / FOR WHAT TYPE OF AUDIENCE IS YOUR MESSAGE MADE?' section with fields for age, sex, educational level, and ethnic/cultural type. Figure 10b is titled 'PLAN OF ACTION' and includes a 1-5 scale, a 'PLAN OF ACTION' section with questions about film length, time, and script, and a 'DESCRIPTION OF SET, PROP, AND COSTUME NEEDS' section.

Figure 10a and 10b. Production module guidelines in Student Learning Activity Guide, (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972, P. 117-118)

LIST SEVEN OR MORE OF 4 FILMS AND YOUR OWN!			
NAME	A	B	C
LIST THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH SERIES!			
LIST SEVERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH SERIES!			
LIST SEVERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH SERIES!			

GENRE CLASSIFICATION AND COMPARISON CHART

MEDIA COURSE

Figure 11. Genre module classification and comparison activity in Student Learning Activity Guide (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972, P. 155).

The Genre module pretest examined students' ability to identify media genre in TV, film, and radio. The first activity was to follow either radio or TV programs, using a writing log and then examine different types of catalogs and their classification. In order to demonstrate understanding, the student would take the genre filmstrip box from the kit and fill in the characteristics of the media genre. The final activity for the Genre module was classification and comparison. As seen in Figure 11,

the student would watch four films and identify the genre characteristics for each one. Then, he would list the similar characteristics in one rubric, and different characteristics on the next rubric. This activity would give the student the ability to compare and contrast in order to identify a film genre while acknowledging the creativity and differences that each genre film has. The final activity would be watching *Citizen Kane* (1941) and looking at the way it breaks all the roles of genre.

MEDIA EVALUATION

FILM EVALUATION RATING FORM

A FILM SHOULD BE JUDGED IN RELATION TO THE PRODUCER'S OBJECTIVES (WHAT HE HOPES TO ACHIEVE IN TERMS OF CONVEYING INFORMATION, CHARACTERS, ATTITUDES, CREATING FEELINGS, ETC.) FOR HIS INTENDED AUDIENCE. READ THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS CAREFULLY.

TITLE: _____

INTENDED AUDIENCE: _____

INFORMATIONAL OBJECTIVE(S): _____

ATTITUDDINAL OBJECTIVE(S): _____

Using the 5 point scale, rate each of the following criteria, keeping the stated audience and objectives in mind. Even though you may not feel completely qualified in all areas, provide your best judgment on each item.

	5 points--Excellent
	4 points--Good
	3 points--Average
	2 points--Fair
	1 point--Poor

	SCORE
1. INVOLVEMENT Will the film attract and hold attention and interest? _____	_____
2. INFORMATIONAL OBJECTIVE Was information presented clearly and unambiguously? _____	_____
3. INFORMATIONAL ACCURACY Was content factual and intellectually honest? _____	_____
4. ATTITUDDINAL OBJECTIVE Will film elicit the intended emotional response? _____	_____
5. BELIEVABILITY Was presentation true sounding and unbiased? _____	_____
6. APPROPRIATENESS Was content and presentation appropriate for audience? _____	_____
7. USE OF MEDIUM Was good use made of the film medium? _____	_____

Figure 12. Media evaluation module rating activity in Student Learning Activity Guide, (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972, P. 171)

The Media Evaluation module was designed to teach the role of the media critique and the different approaches of media evaluation. After taking the pretest, which tested the students' knowledge of types of film, TV, and radio critiques of the time and students' exposure to literature about media, students would learn about persuasion techniques, censorship, and rating formats. The students would watch a film, TV program, or listen to a radio show and use a checklist to evaluate content and form, and then rate it. In order to practice their ability to rate media, the students used

an evaluation form for each media, as seen in Figure 12. Students would listen to a critique review and analyze it (see Figure 13a and 13b.) The teacher guide recommended viewing and practicing the evaluation of the motion picture code of self-regulation with the following movies: *The Godfather* (1972), *Clockwork Orange* (1971), and *Play It Again Sam* (1972). For programming that was news, students were checking the purpose and the facts. They learned to identify the interviewee and their agenda to evaluate the credibility of the news report.



Figure 13a and 13b. Before you trust the critics box. Media evaluation module in the Media Now kit (SILRC, 1972)

The Message Interpretation module was created to help students identify and evaluate propaganda and advertisement. The pretest would assess their prior knowledge and then would be followed by activities of guided consumption of ads. By applying the same rubric of the genre module, the students learn to ask questions about the purpose and production of the media message. One of the most advanced activities is the classification chart (see Figure 14.) in which students were asked to provide

four words that best described the meaning of a message. Then, they rationalized their word choice to be combined into statements that would articulate their analysis and interpretations. One of the boxes in the message interpretations module was *Freedom in Broadcast Journalism* (see Figure 15). The students would listen to the tape and fill up a fact check activity, that was followed with an analysis of the message according to the purpose, target audience, emotions evoked, and persuasion techniques.

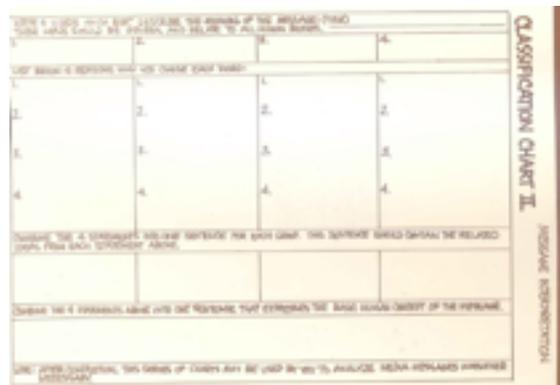


Figure 14. Classification chart II activity in Student Learning Activity Guide, (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972, P. 275)



Figure 15. Freedom in Broadcast Journalism box. Message interpretation module in the Media Now kit (SILRC, 1972)

In the Aesthetics module, students learn to analyze film's motion, time, space, and place. Students learn about the key six artistic principles (unity, theme, thematic variation, balance, hierarchy, and evolution) and demonstrate how they are using them in their production (see Figure 16a and 16b). That activity would be followed by many creative productions from the different boxes in the kit to showcase the use of aesthetics in articulating the

producers' message. For example, the creativity box (see Figure 17.) encouraged students to use their imaginations and aesthetic principles to convey their messages. Students would first illustrate a raw model of an object, which aimed to foster students' ability to imagine and illustrate without criticism as they applied the principle of aesthetics they just learned via audiotapes and filmstrip.

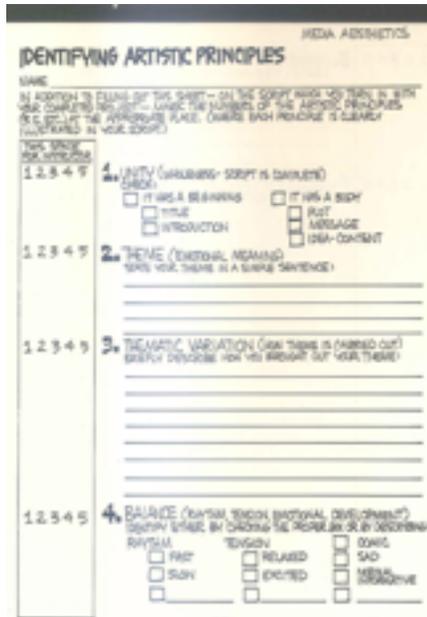


Figure 16a and 16b. Identifying Artistic Principles activity in Student Learning Activity Guide, (Hohlfeld & Curtis, 1972, P. 287-288)



Figure 17. Creativity box. Aesthetics module in the Media Now kit (SILRC, 1972)

The last module was called Presentation, wherein students learned about distribution, cataloging, and promotion. For the screening night at the end of the semester, student would produce their

own tickets and promotional strategies to bring as many friends and family as they could to see their semester-long productions (see Figure 18).



Figure 18. Presentation box. Aesthetics module in the Media Now Kit (SILRC, 1972)

Self-Directed Learning

“It was independent learning, they came in and got their boxes and materials and worked on it.”

(CJ Niles a Media Now teacher and consultant in Niles, 2014)



Figure 19. Media Now in the classroom. The Iowa Department of Public Instruction (DPI Dispatch, January, 1974, P.6)

CJ Niles was one of the lead teachers who taught Media Now and later toured the country demonstrating the curriculum pedagogy to other teachers. She remembered it as one of her best experiences, since the learning was self-directed and provided choices for students:

They (students) would come in and they knew each day what they had to do. And we had guidelines like ‘you had to do two package and by nine weeks, half of the semester, you had to do twelve packages.’ By the first three weeks we had to get all the hardware packages done so that everybody was done with the hardware by then...It was independent learning and they came in and got their boxes and materials and worked on it. And then, they would read what was supposed to be done... There would be two people in this corner working on something together and then there would be five people working on their own on something, and maybe there would be a group of four, because we had them do commercials, they went together and did a commercial or at the end I think we did a TV show. (Niles, 2014)

After students progressed through the hardware module each student could choose which of the five middle modules they wanted to work on. The final module, Presentation, would finish the curriculum sequence. The variety and structure of writing, viewing, producing, and discussion help to grow the student’s analytical and critical skills. Besides the checklists and questionnaires, students would keep notes, and would write as a way to engage in media production. One example was the TV and radio log students kept to document the amount of commercial content in a program. Other examples included writing scripts and newspaper articles, as well as writing reviews of films, radio and TV shows, and newspaper articles, as ways to analyze and critique media.

The three main curriculum boxes would be

presented on the side of the classroom, where students could take the packages from the boxes and find a place to work on them. Each student would have one Students’ Activity guide and one Students’ Learning Activity Book. The boxes each had instructions and the teacher would use his or her Learning Activity Guide to make copies of the pretests and the different forms. The teacher would circulate among the group of students and guide or support their self-directed learning. Niles (2014) added that it helped develop leadership skills for many students that were not successful in the other classes. She recalled one student who got C and D in all the other classes, but in her class he was in charge of the projector and received an A grade in her course. After he had mastered that skill, this student was acting in a supervisory role, ensuring that everybody else knew how to work the projector properly. Independent learning challenged students to manage their time properly, in order to finish their assignments by the deadline. Yet, this challenge of time management is an important dimension that helped achieve Media Now’s goals.

Hohlfeld and Niles toured the country demonstrating their successful experience teaching Media Now as an innovative subject area, as well as its pedagogy of self-directed learning. On June 26, 1975 the National Dissemination Network under Title III of the ESEA, recommended the curriculum be included in national demonstration schools that could be set up as visiting locations for potential Media Now adopters. Located in Chicago, Portland, San Francisco, Houston, and Los Angeles, state and local facilitators demonstrated the flexible model of the Media Now curriculum. Over 201 Media Now adoptions can be traced back to contacts within this dissemination network. By the end of the seventies, SILRC sold 600 Media Now kits to 30 States, Canada, Sweden, and Israel (Curtis, 1980).

Validating The Curriculum

“The behavior was: to be able to...produce a product...And the other level of behavior was in answering X out of Y number of questions correctly. That was simply a way to justify that people who are taking your class are actually learning.”

(Daniel Perkins, Iowa State University Professor in the 1970’s in Perkins, 2014).



Figure 20a and 20b. Pre- and post-test of attitude towards mass media (SILRC, 1972).

The project’s goal was to design, develop, validate, produce, and disseminate a mass media course of study for secondary students. The goal presented a challenge to the creators: how to measure the primary effects of the Media Now curriculum. As part of the federal grant, Media Now had to show a change in the student behavior and attitude toward media. In the summer of 1970, Curtis and Hohlfeld laid out the four main behavioral objectives of Media Now: increase knowledge of the media, develop media production skills, increase critical analysis of media persuasion, and change attitude toward media (Curtis, 1975c). The Media Now kit had different pre- and post-tests to measure each module’s objectives. For example, the cognitive mastery test was the Hardware pre- and post-test. Hohlfeld (2014) explained that the ability to define, research, and deliver these objectives was innovative: “We were over the curve with the behavioral objectives.”

Four researchers were hired to work on the project. Under the supervision of Dr. Bill Majure, the researchers went to schools and did pre- and post-tests that measured the behavioral and attitudinal change of the students. At first, the curriculum was field-tested in several rural schools and the practices of research and implementation were refined for real

world scenarios. The first three years of operation were dedicated to curriculum development, field-testing, and revision. The results from the research indicated that an individualized approach to learning was an effective method of presenting course material.

In January 1973, five teachers were selected to participate in additional phases of research, targeted to a socio-economic cross-section of Iowa’s student population. A second phase of the field tests encompassed twenty-five high schools located though the state of Iowa, all of diverse composition. The third phase of the project was a field test that included 140 Iowa school districts reaching 28,000 students. During 1973, the Media Now research team outside of the state of Iowa validated the Media Now project. Representatives from the Joint Dissemination Review Panel for the United States Office of Education and the National Institute of Education validated the instrumentation created for the curriculum and determined the project to be innovative, successful, cost effective, and exportable. Media Now’s curriculum passed the review with a score of 100 points out of a possible 100. At that time, only one hundred and seven Title III projects had achieved this recognition. And yet, the changes in local and national politics during the eighties

influenced the funding which started to diminish.

Looking at the evidence-based approach in the context of CCSS, Media Now offered many examples of how to incorporate small tests as learning activities for each module. Students benefited from the self-directed learning process as well as from the evaluation of their progress not to mention the acknowledgment that Media Now received nation-wide as a validated curriculum that helped promote students' media literacy. At the same time however, Iowa State University Professor, Daniel Perkins was unable to teach the class to

undergraduates since the University Senate thought the curriculum was not encouraging students to be critical thinkers (Perkins, 2014). Yet, undergraduate level courses of study using Media Now as a curriculum base were implemented in Central Michigan University and American University. Not all teachers and administrators could embrace the messiness of self-directed learning (Niles, 2014) and though it did have spiral activities to revisit the knowledge that was learned, the physical box curriculum became outdated with cable TV in the mid 1980's.

The End of Media Now

“The end of Media Now was like a clock that wears out.”

(Bill Hohlfeld in Hohlfeld, 2014).



Figure 21. Media Now logo (SILRC, 1972)

As with its creation, the causes for the eventual demise of the Media Now curriculum are closely tied to the lifecycle of SILRC. While SILRC was fighting to keep state funding supporting in the divided southwest school Iowa district, the Reagan administration in the 1980s cut the funding for the National Diffusion Network, and the ESEA Title III innovation grant. As a result, both the SILRC and Media Now gradually lost their funding. Other

challenges were the ‘back to basics’ movement that perceived media studies as extraneous to the conventional wisdom of educational priorities such as reading, writing, and math (Curtis, 1980). Without continued funding, it was impossible to incorporate updates in media production, so new video technology and computers were not added to the curriculum, making some exercises in the Media Now curriculum outdated.

Media Now Significance

“[Media Now] liberated a lot of the people who came out against Media Now; they find out that you could teach without having a blackboard in front of you.”

(Bill Hohlfeld in Hohlfeld, 2014).



Figure 22. Bill Hohlfeld giving a seminar on Media Now at SILRC (SILRC, N.D.)

Media Now is significant to the contemporary media literacy practice for three reasons: training and support of teachers, validated evaluation, and comprehensive approach to media consumption. First, the curriculum promoted media studies as a new subject matter for high school using critical analysis and creative production. It employed Dewey's experiential learning (1997[1938]) with the kit's self-directed, non-linear learning as innovated pedagogy. Similar to current approaches, such as the "flipped" classroom and blended learning, Media Now was a new way of engaging and learning different media. Unlike contemporary initiatives using digital tools, SILRC and the Media Now staff trained teachers and supplied resources to support the non-linear independent learning. Teachers and students using the curriculum felt comfortable using the kind of pedagogy that enabled students to clearly see and structure their learning to meet goals and assignments.

Second, in light of today's educational climate of standardized tests, the innovation in assessment of behavioral outcomes as a new validated measure can be implemented in current classrooms. The creators went further than the commonly used Bloom's taxonomy (1956) of cognitive learning domains and in doing so, were able to gain an ESEA Title III innovation grant that demanded a valid test to show behavioral change. Media Now was able to create a series of tests to

measure behavioral outcomes of students, such as changes in media consumption habits in written and spoken reflective ability, production skills, and in tested attitudes toward media. The advantage of Media Now could be found in its comprehensive physical kit. We see, thus, that the Media Now kit aspired to professional standards of educational innovation design, practice, and distribution of the seventies.

Third, Media Now served its purpose in many ways, as evidenced by our conference call with Ron Curtis, Bill Hohlfeld, Jill Jensen, and Elizabeth Thoman. Curtis stated that Media Now "reached its purpose to make young people more knowledgeable about the media." Hohlfeld explained "it made young people aware of the media. It did, actually, make them comfortable with using the media... It was hands-on media." Jensen described: "You could see the light go on. You could just see the enthusiasm... the interest that [the students] had in understanding that they were now in control of whatever the message they wanted to get across" (Curtis et al., 2013). The technological developments of cable TV, mobile devices, and the Internet emphasize how much the practice of critical analysis and production of various media in a comprehensive way as Media now did, is necessary.

Elizabeth Thoman, the founder of The Center for Media Literacy, donated in 2012 the last complete kit of Media Now to the University of

Rhode Island. Referring to Media Now, she noted that “[i]n the chronology of the history of media literacy, this serves as one of the high points” (Thoman in Curtis et al., 2013). Nonetheless, she added that “[t]he biggest problem was that it was limited in its reach. Even though it reached hundred

of kids and thousand of kids...still, there are 50,000 school districts in the US, [and] you could not reach all of those.” It is clear that Media Now, despite its originality, would need to go through major adaptation to be applicable to current digital media.

Media Now?

“I learned right away that it takes much to stimulate today’s high school student even a little. Media can successfully motivate where individual teachers can’t possibly meet the demands”

(Melody Henn, a Northwest Missouri State College senior in 1972 SILRC newsletter).



Figure 23. Media Now Kit. Cover of Sound Tracks (SILRC, May 1977).

Changes in media over the last 50 years, particularly digital and mobile media, have outdated the Media Now curriculum from 1972. Still, the need for learning about media by producing media, is just as important as it was 50 years ago. We suggest that Media Now, with its engaging pedagogy and effective form of evaluation, can help serve as a model reference for creation of a media-literacy curriculum to addresses current media content, formats, and current educational policy. The discourse about protection and empowerment that was aggravated by Agnew’s speech is as relevant today with the internet and social media, and the current political climate as it was with newspapers, TV, radio, and movies in the seventies maybe more

so, as metadata and privacy concerns collide.

Media Now offered a well-structured, non-linear curriculum that handed the control over messages to students, combining analysis and production - something that could still be applied to today’s media literacy objectives. We looked at the question of applicability and adaptability to media literacy, and we see Media Now less as a faded memory of what it was once, but as an example of an innovative project of creative and visionary media educators, one that can serve as an impetus for educators today. All would benefit by looking into the detailed curriculum and its kit, and use it as a curriculum that can be adapted and adjusted to the digital age to teach about the media now.

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