OHIO MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA LITERACY

A Master's Research Paper Presented to
The Faculty of the College of Education
Otto University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Education

By Jennifer Hinkle
June 2010
This Master Research Project has been approved

for the Department of Teacher Education

Franz H. Dopp and, Associate Professor, Middle Childhood Education

John E. Wenning, Professor, Chair of the Department of Teacher Education
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evolution of Media Literacy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Concepts of Curriculum</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Literacy Practices</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Literacy in Practice</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and Barriers of Media Literacy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methods</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Findings</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Literacy and the Ohio Academic Content Standards</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Literacy and Literacy Instruction</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefining Literacy</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Views on Literacy</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Imagine a sixth-grade classroom in which students start the day by interviewing a community member who makes a living in the local fishing industry. By dismissal at the end of the day, they have used their interview notes, camera footage, and photos to create multi-media reports ready to be published on the Web. Picture a group of 10th grade students who analyze articles from popular newsmagazines to identify how the words, fonts, and colors create a message, also learning history, culture, and current events through the articles’ contents. In both classes, students are experiencing new methods of literacy instruction that emphasize the use of media, technology, and analytical skills to also teach content material (Sperry, 2006; Kist, 2003).

Such practices illustrate how some educators are changing their instructional strategies to include more work with media and technology, especially focusing on the application of critical thinking and evaluation skills. The sixth grade teacher, for instance, believes his students need to be able to understand, create, and transmit information in a variety of mediums (Kist, 2003); the 10th grade teacher writes that students need to understand the ways that media can shape their ideas and beliefs (Sperry, 2006). They reflect the growing implementation of “new literacies,” an umbrella concept generally referring to computer literacy, information literacy, television literacy, visual literacy, and media literacy, as well as other “literacies” that have emerged in the late 1990s (Somali, 2001). As Somali (2001) points out, “these literacies involve specific competencies that seem to be in demand in schools and industry” (New Literacies in the Post-typographic, Multimedia Era section, ¶1).
A new literacy increasingly recognized for its educational promise is media literacy, which some proponents believe could “transform curriculum, teaching, and even society” (Schwarz, 2005, p. 6). Media literacy is generally defined as “a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms...” (Center for Media Literacy, 2009, Media Literacy: A definition … and more section ¶2). Most agree that media literacy promotes critical analysis skills, values empowerment of individuals to create personal meaning, and posits media as a creation that transmits messages which can be of powerful influence (Schwarz, 2005). Teachers turn to media literacy to integrate technology, protect students from the effects of media violence, promote diversity, explore issues of power structure and ideology, or a number of other reasons (Hobbs, 2005). Sperry (2006) believes media literacy improves student knowledge:

Our students are bombarded daily with a ceaseless barrage of media messages, many of them with historical content. It is no longer possible, if it ever was, for me to fill them up with accurate information. In order to teach them to understand history, I must honestly and energetically address the primary sources of their knowledge. If I am going to help my students to become educated, reflective and informed seekers of truth, I must help them to think deeply and critically about the messages they receive through the media (p. 37).

Statement of the Problem

Media literacy research, in the words of Fox (2005), is “akin to a jet plane as it taxis toward the runway” (p. 251) – exciting and promising. Many proponents, including researchers, teachers, parents, and activists, have voiced support for media literacy and identified quantifiable learning benefits for students. An emerging critical question, however, is how to implement
media literacy into school curricula (Semali, 2001). Stein and Prewitt (2009) noted that “despite the growing recognition of media literacy education as a field of study, few researchers have focused on its implementation” (p. 232). Hobbs (2005) identified that teachers are leading the effort to bring media literacy into classrooms, although it is “impossible” (p. 74), to know just how many teachers are doing so, or to what extent. Teachers, in their efforts to use media literacy in the classroom, can be limited by administrative rules restricting media, a dearth of resources or tools, or their own lack of experience and training (Hobbs, 2005). School principals play an important role in keeping teachers current on new developments in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (DuFour, 2002). However, there is little if any previous research on principals’ perceptions or interest in implementing new literacies into school curricula.

As a prospective teacher, I am interested in principals’ perspectives toward media literacy. Principals’ duties are varied and increasingly oriented towards instructional leadership, according to Hallinger (2005), particularly since the reforms-based education movement of the last decade has placed significant emphasis on student achievement and school accountability (Jenkins, 2009). Principals often play an important role in student growth through resource allocation, lesson plan monitoring, teacher evaluations and curriculum management (Jenkins, 2009). As no official national curriculum currently exists, each state defines its own curriculum standards, often sharing a common core of learning requirements (Porter & Polikoff, 2009).

After conducting an extensive review of the research on media literacy, I believe principals have a critical role to play in the implementation of media literacy. Principals promote student learning and teacher growth, in part, by managing and staying current on curriculum issues (Jenkins, 2009; DuFour, 2002). Media literacy is one such issue which deserves principals’ attention and consideration. However, there is little if any previous research on
principals’ perspectives on media literacy, in Ohio or elsewhere. This exploratory study will begin to identify principals’ perceptions of media literacy in Ohio. The main research questions addressed in this Master Research Project are:

1.) To what extent do Ohio middle school principals perceive the Ohio Academic Content Standards to promote media literacy?

2.) What are Ohio middle school principals’ perspectives on the impact of barriers to media literacy on literacy instruction?

Significance of the Study

This study will provide information on principals’ perspectives on media literacy, particularly as it relates to the Ohio curriculum and literacy practices in general.

Organization

This Master’s Research Project includes five chapters. Chapter One provided an introduction to the study. Chapter Two, Literature Review, will synthesize relevant research pertaining to media literacy and the roles that principals play as curriculum leaders. Chapter Three, Methods, will discuss the methods of this study. Chapter Four, Results, will report the findings of this study. Chapter Five, Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations, will integrate the findings of this study with relevant research and offer suggestions and implications for future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Media literacy is a subject of exploration in a variety of fields including literature, media studies, and health (Hobbs, 2005). For the purposes of this paper, however, I focus on media literacy as it relates solely to education. Thus, Chapter 2 of this paper will explore the origins and foundations of media literacy, its role in schools and curricula today, and the barriers to media literacy.

The Evolution of Media Literacy in the Late 20th Century

New concept to most Americans As Hobbs (2005) found, media literacy is beginning to enter classrooms through the efforts of teachers who believe in its value. Yet, according to Schwarz, “media literacy is still a new concept to most Americans, including educators” (2005, p. 5). Schools outside the U.S., however, have a history with media literacy that dates back decades. When the first major U.S. media literacy conference was held in 1992, Germany already offered optional media literacy programs for students in grades 5-10 (Aufderheide, 1992). At the same time, media literacy had recently become mandatory in Ontario schools (Aufderheide, 1992). Educators there modeled media literacy after existing school programs in England and Australia (Aufderheide, 1992). Luke (2007) writes that media literacy was taught in “earnest” in the 1980s in Australia, using a “neo-Marxist ideology critique” to examine popular media “as [the] purveyor of false consciousness, ideological indoctrination and, not least, mindless
consumerism” (p. 3). In the classroom, theory transferred into practice in part “by asking students to reflect on why they view what they do” (Luke, 2007).

Why do students select certain programs over others? How do they incorporate media and popular culture into their everyday lives? How do media messages (say, the latest hairstyles or clothes on the sitcom Friends or on MTV) shape students’ identity constructions – through clothing, speech, or posters on bedroom walls? How are their friendship groups connected through shared media and popular cultural tastes? (Luke, 2007, p. 623).

Such questions continue in media literacy instruction today. Luke (2007) writes that media literacy in the 1990s moved beyond critique and “deconstruction” to a recognition that media is constructed, as well as a source of pleasure, which also affected the practices of media literacy.

U.S. History of Media Literacy

Educators in the United States may be less familiar with media literacy (Schwarz, 2005), but there was a push for it here several decades ago. In 1969, the Center for the Understanding of Media opened in Greenwich Village, New York, to “teach teachers how to understand all forms of media including print, theater, and the new electronic forms such as film and television” (Center for Media Literacy, 2007, Culkin became a renowned and excellent interpreter of McLuhan's thoughts and work section, ¶2). Founder John Culkin was deeply influenced by the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, and with a background in education, curriculum, and film studies, “wanted to teach teachers to think in new ways” (Center for Media Literacy, 2007, Culkin became a renowned and excellent interpreter of McLuhan's thoughts and work section, ¶4):
He believed that if teachers understood the function of media in culture, they could use that awareness to help young people become better learners. By the late 1960s there was more information outside the classroom than in it, due to the pervasiveness of film and TV. Much of the information was really misinformation, so that ‘separating the signal from the noise’ became a necessary task.

The Center for the Understanding of Media was part of a wider movement calling for media literacy instruction in the U.S. and Canada in the late 1960s (Pungente, Duncan, & Anderson, 2005). This movement became successful in Canada based on “(1) critical concerns about the pervasiveness of American popular culture, and (2) our system of education across the country, which fostered the necessary contexts for new educational paradigms” (Pungente, Duncan, & Anderson, 2005 p. 141). In the U.S., however, the media literacy movement all but folded. Previous studies have attributed that movement’s decline to lack of funding (Anderson & Ploghoft, 1993, as cited by Schwarz, 2005), and furthermore, to the proponents’ focus on “protectionism,” denial of media’s entertainment value, disregard of educators’ and students’ voices, and failure to integrate media literacy into daily teaching instruction (Tyner, 1998, as cited by Schwarz, 2005, p. 9). Schwarz (2005) writes that this early media literacy movement went “dormant” (p. 9), but re-emerged in the early 1990s, particularly because more people were becoming owners and users of personal computers. Scholars, religious activists, media consumers, critics and activists, as well as teachers, were all attempting to bring media literacy into education, out of concerns of the media’s influence on youngsters, but also for the ideologies promoted through media, according to Schechter (1997, as cited by Schwartz, 2005).
New Literacies in the 21st Century Curriculum

*Media literacy and New Literacies* In more recent times, media literacy has played an important role in the dialogue on “new literacies,” which refer to the variety of skill sets and competencies students need to negotiate the technological changes and proliferation of information of the 21st century work environment. (Semali, 2001) As Jewitt (2008) discusses, the use of media and our relationship with it is changing, particularly as people become creators and collaborators, not just consumers of media information. We frequently get information in electronic form instead of print, and the job market demands high-proficiency technology skills (Jewitt, 2008). Furthermore, we are experiencing “the accelerated transnational flows of people as well as information, ideology, and materials in contexts in which knowledge is highly situated, rapidly changing, and more diverse than ever before (Appadurai, 1990, Kalatzis, Cope & Harvey, 2003)” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 243).

These “new times,” a termed coined by Luke and Elkins (1998), have implications for literacy. One of the most important forerunners advocating the merge of literacy instruction with 21st century demands was The New London Group, whose 1996 position paper called for schools to acknowledge “multiliteracies,” a concept that closely resembles new literacies (Jewitt, 2008). Semali (2001) identified many different types of “new literacies,” ranging from visual to computer to informational. Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) believe that these new literacies are “by nature,” (p. 1594) multiliteracies. Leu et al. (2004) also points out that “a more precise definition of these new literacies may never be possible to achieve because their most important characteristic is that they change regularly” (p. 72). Also of note, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1995 released *Great Transitions: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century*, which reported that “schools should do well to introduce instruction and activities that
contribute to media literacy,” according to Considine (2002, p. 9 as cited by Schwarz, 2005). Although the research literature in recent years suggests there is an increased interest in media literacy in state curricula (Hobbs and Frost, 2003), “few researchers have focused on its implementation” (Stein and Prewitt, 2009 p. 232).

Changing Concepts of Curriculum

Each state defines its own curriculum standards as part of the states’ rights principle of the U.S. government (Porter and Polikoff, 2009): “[No Child Left Behind] is clear that the federal government is not to be involved in the setting of content standards or the creation of NCLB assessments. Each state sets its own content standards and uses its own student achievement tests” (Porter and Polikoff, 2009, p. 245). In Ohio, statewide Academic Content Standards guide the curriculum. According to the Ohio Department of Education, the purpose of standards is to “describe the knowledge and skills that students should attain… They indicate the ways of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning and investigating, and important and enduring ideas, concepts, issues, dilemmas and knowledge essential to the discipline” (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

In school buildings, curriculum management at one time was considered the main duty of the principal, according to DuFour (2002). The principal was responsible for “coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction in the school (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985)” according to Hallinger (2003, p. 331). In the 1980s, however, principals became largely responsible for the effectiveness of their schools, as policy makers moved toward standards-based reform (Hallinger, 2005). In an important analysis of school leadership, March (1978, as cited by Hallinger, 2005), put forth that “principals could provide key leverage for change” (p. 12). While principals are still considered crucial players in
the effectiveness of their schools, recent research has promoted a model of “mutually influential process” in which “leaders influence others” rather than the principal as the main leader (Hallinger, 2005, p. 15). In addition, school context and the needs of the students determine the principal’s role and his or her duties (Hallinger, 2005).

In terms of principals’ influence on school literacy practices, Kinney (2009) suggests that student literacy improvement depends on teachers’ training, support, and availability of resources, all of which are heavily influenced by the principal. These three issues affect media literacy instruction in schools (Hobbs, 2005; Schwarz, 2005b). In many cases, despite such barriers, teachers are working on their own to implement media literacy into their classroom practices (Hobbs, 2005). Other teachers are focusing on a broader range of new literacy skills, by adding more media, information analysis, and technology lessons to their subject areas (Kist, 2003). Classroom media literacy efforts often spring from a teacher’s personal motivations, not through the curriculum mandates of the school, district, or state (Hobbs, 2005).

Adolescent Literacy Practices

Discrepancies The National Middle School Association suggests that middle school teaching should “enhance and accommodate the diverse skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents, cultivate multiple intelligences, and draw upon students’ individual learning styles” (NMSA, 2003, p. 25). Yet, adolescent literacy as it is often taught neglects students’ actual literacy practices, which include reading fiction, magazines, Web sites and writers’ forums, and communicating through e-mail, electronic chat and letters, as Pitcher et al. (2007) found. Adolescents today interact heavily with media and create media. According to Rainie (2009), 60% of teens have a computer, 40% have video cameras, and 75% of teens who use the Internet have created Internet content. Students as well as their teachers often don’t associate
students’ out-of-school literacy practices with academic literacy, which reinforces misperceptions that the students don’t read often, read poorly, or don’t enjoy reading (Pitcher et al., 2007). For example, Jason, a student in the study by Pitcher et al., answered that he “never” likes to read, yet expressed enthusiasm about his new subscription to a hunting magazine, and his enjoyment of reading a survival story in it (p. 391). Another student, Jared, checked in the survey that he read “not very often,” but, when interviewed, said that he’d learned new fishing tactics from Field and Stream magazine (Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 391). These students illustrate what Pitcher et al. (2007) identifies as a discrepancy between school literacy practices and students’ actual out-of-school literacies. Jason and Jared both show evidence of reading for enjoyment and learning, but identify themselves as not or infrequently enjoying reading. Several students fall into similar themes: Paul, who says reading is “boring,” yet spends 20 hours a week reading e-mails and using the Internet for reading articles and playing games; Michael, who said he “never” reads a book, but later discusses the magazines, hobby books, and friends’ stories he reads (Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 391); Jenna, who rarely e-mails friends, but “talks” with them by instant messaging at night (p. 392).

Educators’ Values Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis found, as cited by Harris (2008, p. 251) that educators distinguish between “recreational” and “academic” activities in choosing instructional resources, even if a resource they think is recreational may better reach students. Teachers also express hesitation and fear about bringing pop culture into their classrooms despite evidence of its effectiveness with students (Morrell, 2002). Some administrators discourage pop culture in their schools (Hobbs, 2005). Mallette, Henk, Waggoner, and Delaney (2005) found that middle school educators valued new literacies less than basic literacies, defined as “reading comprehension, vocabulary, word identification, fluency, writing, at-risk students, and literature
in the content areas” (p. 37). The participants of the study, who represented 12 top public schools in Illinois, recognized overall that students read more now, and, as a result of e-mail, write to one another more than previous generations. (Mallette et al., 2005) Still, only about half the educators reacted positively to the idea of merging new and basic literacies, and those who did were motivated mainly by the idea of making class relevant and student-centered (Mallette et al., 2005). A few did not know what new literacies meant (Mallette et al., 2005).

The teachers who did not embrace this notion voiced their concerns about students not being fundamentally prepared for the future or not having appropriate basic language skills. Among their concerns were the necessity of ‘preparing them for how they will need literacy in the future (jobs, life skills)’ and ‘teaching the value and appreciation of being literate.’ Teachers with these concerns did not seem to view students out-of-school literacies as being literate. (Mallette et al, 2005, p. 39)

Pitcher et al. (2007) suggests that educators and administrators “recognize the multiple literacies in which students engage outside of the classroom and find ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction,” (p. 394) as well as provide students more choice in reading and projects, and bring to classrooms a wider variety of text formats, topics, skill levels, and literature circles and book clubs.

Theoretical Framework of Media Literacy

Definitions and Values Citing Aufderheide and Firestone (1993), most researchers define media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (Hobbs, 2005, p. 74). “Media” is a broad term referring to books, magazines, radio, television, movies, recorded music, the Internet, videos, even billboards and video games (Project Look Sharp, 2009). The definitions of media literacy vary. The National Council for the
Social Studies recently defined media literacy as a “pedagogical approach promoting the use of diverse types of media and information communication technology (from crayons to webcams) to question the roles of media and society and the multiple meanings of all types of messages” (The National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2009, Purpose/Definition section ¶1). The Center for Media Literacy says media literacy “is about helping students become competent, critical and literate in all media forms so that they control the interpretation of what they say or hear rather than letting the interpretation control them” (CML, 2007, What Is Media Literacy? A Definition … and More section, ¶5). Text analysis, sociocritical theories, and cultural studies form the foundation of media literacy instruction (Hobbs, 2005), with strong underpinnings of democratic values and acknowledgment of the influence of global and local affairs (Luke, 2007). Economic and social justices are important values in media literacy (Semali, 2001).

The CML lists the following “core concepts of media literacy”:

1. All media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.” (CML, 2007, Five Core Concepts section)

Critical Media Literacy

Kellner and Share (2007) focus on the “critical component” of media literacy that they say “must transform literacy education into an exploration of the ideological role of language and communication to define relationships of power and domination” (p. 61). Critical media literacy, accordingly:
Starts from embracing difference and a movement toward the cultivation of civic pluralism. It does avail students with the skills necessary to succeed in the new global economy, but as part of a larger agenda to challenge the ‘new world order.’ It alters the nature of discourse away from deficiency theories, and sees cultural and linguistic diversity as assets that can be harnessed toward improving social, political, and economic life. (Van Heertum & Share, 2006, p. 259)

Furthermore, Van Heertum and Share (2006) write that critical media literacy, in action, truly challenges a standard curriculum, because it inherently opposes what Van Heertum and Share identify as oppression through the capitalist economic structure and the domination of technological resources.

**Media Literacy in Practice**

Instruction and Outcomes Classroom practices in media literacy tend to revolve around text deconstruction (with “text” being any form of media), discussion, inquiry, analysis, reflection, and in many cases, some type of production. Learning outcomes, according to the NCSS, are the “cultural competencies and social skills associated with a growing participatory culture” (NCSS, 2009, Purpose/Definition section ¶2). It is more than journalism or news production, although they may be components (Hobbs, 2005). Some teachers use pop culture songs, TV shows, or magazines as texts (Vargas, 2006; Mitchie, 1999). Van Heertum and Share (2006) advocate flexible, differentiated curriculum; content geared toward children’s interests, deconstruction of texts and creation of media, as well as skill-teaching and dialogue. The lack of school texts and substantiated teaching methods for media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007) may give teachers freedom to experiment and create unique lessons of particular relevance to their students, but can also result in ineffective instruction or the perpetuation of misinformation.
(Vargas, 2006). Some teachers, as well as Project Look Sharp (2009), employ the CML’s five key questions of media literacy deconstruction as a foundation for lesson plans. The questions are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent? (CML, 2007, Five Key Questions section)

Pop Culture and Technology

Greg Mitchie, a high school teacher in Chicago, discusses his experience teaching media literacy class in his 1999 book, *Holler If You Hear Me*. Mitchie, whose class primarily consisted of students from historically marginalized groups and low-income households, taught a media literacy class focusing on production and critical viewing. In one unit, he showed clips from family sitcoms including *Leave it to Beaver, The Brady Bunch, Fresh Prince of Bel-Aire, Married with Children*, and *Roseanne*. Over the course of the lesson, students compared the shows, deconstructing their content, mechanics, and characters, and analyzed and talked about what the shows portrayed.

In many ways, the ‘texts’ of which these characters are a part of are richer and more multilayered than the textbooks and basal readers that clutter classroom shelves… We begin by defining the characteristics of the genre (30 minutes long, often set in a household, audible laughter, high-key lighting, problem always resolved) as well as the different types of humor used (physical, situational misunderstandings, one-liners,
insults, sexual. The kids also undertook an informal demographic study of the most popular sitcoms and discovered that there were none that featured Latino or Arabic families or characters. In addition, except for Roseanne, sitcom families appeared to be either upper middle-class or wealthy. (Mitchie, 1999, pps. 95-96)

Mitchie discovered that the television show analysis also paved the way for discussions on stereotypes, representation, and opportunities for women in television, as well as changing ideas about what is entertainment by comparing older shows to newer ones. At the end of the unit, students were invited to write a letter to a television station expressing their feelings about the issues they noticed in the shows (Mitchie, 1999).

In another unit exploring the message of the media, Mitchie used the students’ favorite music as a starting point. Inspired by hearing two students sing the popular song “Waterfalls” by TLC, Mitchie asked students to write down the lyrics of a song of their choice. Secondly, they were to identify the purpose, message, or story, and, similar to analyzing a piece of literature, “discuss characters, conflict, symbolism, figurative language, moral, message, humor, and anything else that seemed important” (p. 99). The song could be in English or Spanish, fitting the needs of students, many of whom spoke English as a second language. One student reported spending five hours working out the meaning of Bone Thugs & Harmony’s “Crosswords”. Another surmised that Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise” is about a teacher’s inability to relate to or teach his students. One brought in a song that Mitchie found so offensive, he decided not to let the student share the song with the class and instead planned to discuss privately with the student the song’s themes of misogyny.

Abigail Kennedy, the 2006 recipient of The National Council of Teachers of English Media Literacy Award, utilizes literature, advertisements, and technology to teach media literacy
through content material. In one unit, students create book reports – instead of writing them, however, they create podcasts with video and still pictures. In another assignment, students create some type of announcement, which teaches them how messages are constructed and reinforces the purpose of advertising. One of Kennedy’s former students reported that media literacy is “really critical thinking,” (as cited by Johnston, 2008, p. 2) and she “doesn’t watch television the same as she did before” Kennedy’s class.

World Affairs and Cultural Relativity

Sperry (2006), a high school history teacher in New York, teaches media literacy and is director of curriculum and staff development of Project Look Sharp. As described in Chapter 1, Sperry (2006) uses news magazines for media literacy-skill instruction and decoding, while also reinforcing content and vocabulary. The key to effective lessons, he writes, is choosing the right texts (Sperry, 2006). Mitchie (1999) concurs: “Trying to indoctrinate them with ‘quality’ television isn’t the point. Better to teach them to become more discriminating themselves, to be able to see through the glitz and pseudo-style of a program to what lies underneath” (p. 95). Sperry (2006) suggests that the school librarian or media specialist can be instrumental in finding the right texts to decode.

Students in Sperry’s class also compared and contrasted different Web sites to reinforce history’s subjective nature, requiring them to “confront fundamental questions of what to believe” (Sperry, 2006, p. 43). For example, students analyzed two different Web sites about the 1948 creation of Gaza – one from the Palestinian perspective describing “the Great Catastrophe” and one with an Israeli website celebrating “the rebirth of Israel” (Sperry, 2006, p. 41). As with the magazine analysis, students learned historical content while beginning to grapple with differing perspectives. A similar lesson on the history of Iraq asked students to compare a
historical timeline produced by the U.S. State Department with one created by the President Bush oppositional group People Judge Bush (Sperry, 2006). One of Sperry’s students, at the end of her school year, reported that “the media analysis work led her to question everything and lose her idealistic innocence. But she was grateful because she now believed that she had a more accurate view of reality and was prepared to make the world a better place” (Sperry, 2006, p. 42).

In a discussion on critical media literacy, Orlowski (2006) puts forth that media literacy begins with helping “students become aware of their own social location or positionality… the idea that people from differing social background often have different ways of perceiving the world, constructing knowledge, and making meaning” (p. 184). Orlowski (2006) taught media literacy in a Vancouver high school, where students were predominantly working-class and multicultural. Orlowski discusses one unit in which students analyzed newspaper articles and categorized how various groups and individuals represented conservative, liberal, and radical political positions. Students finished the unit, Orlowski (2006) reported, able to identify spin, bias, and the influences behind the articles (in one case, the newspaper reporting from conservative perspective donated money to a liberal party the previous year), as well as how print media can portray people and issues.

Media Literacy in the Curriculum

Content Areas Media literacy can be taught in all content areas and grade levels (CML, 2007). Mitchie introduced it to adolescents with special needs, Sperry to high school history students, and Kennedy to high school language arts students. Language arts has naturally been a home for media literacy (Hobbs, 2005; Luke, 1999), and health curricula have used media literacy as a way to address a wide variety of adolescent issues such as media violence, dietary
choices, and body image (Project Look Sharp, 2009). In social studies, the nature of learning content material through the study of various sources, including letters, diaries, pamphlets, and newspapers, likely makes media literacy, “so embedded … as to be hidden from view” (Hobbs, 2005, p.78). Yet the important question about the variety of sources is “how” they are used, suggests Hobbs (2005, p. 78).

Do social studies teachers encourage students to reflect upon the ways in which media genres, forms, and representations shape message content? Do social studies educators help students to understand that media texts do not offer transparent reflections of events or people, but interpretations, presented with varying degrees of reliability and power?” (2005, p. 78).

Media literacy also fits into a math and science curriculums. Project Look Sharp offers the following ideas for media literacy integration in a middle school math program:

- “Conduct frequency counts of various aspects of media content, summarizing by different types of media (e.g., amount of violence, amount of advertising), using geometry to calculate area of coverage for print media.

- Calculate size distortions and other exaggerations in the media by computing proportions.

- Consider statistics that are left out to distort perception” (Project Look Sharp, Ideas for Incorporating Media Literacy Strategies for Middle School Grades (and above) section, 2009 ¶1-3).

The extent to which media production activities, such as school newspaper and TV news, fall into media literacy category is disputed. Masterman (1985, as cited by Hobbs, 2005) believes that media production can lead to an appearance of students’ learning, even if they are just doing
busywork. Hobbs (2005), however, views such “preprofessional experiences” (p. 87) as an opportunity to advance media literacy skills, citing a case in which a school newspaper’s controversial letter to the editor served as a vehicle to educate the school community about freedom of the press and the First Amendment. Other times, media education is limited to production toward vocation preparation, which should not be confused with media literacy (Hobbs, 2005).

Media Literacy in Social Studies and Language Arts

While media literacy has potential for every content area (CML, 2007; Hobbs, 2005), Hobbs (2005) recognizes that the “process of instruction” (p. 91) in media literacy relates to the inquiry processes – reflection, information gathering, critical thinking, and authentic message creation – practiced in social studies and English language arts. Previous studies that identified media literacy skills in state curricula also found that social studies and English language arts strands held the most indicators that relate to media literacy (Kubey & Baker, 1999). In February 2009, NCSS issued a position paper calling for the teaching of media literacy in U.S. public schools (The National Council for the Social Studies, 2009), while the National Council for the Teachers of English [NCTE] has given an annual media literacy teacher award since 2006. According to Porter and Polikoff (2009), if more states used the standards of national professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), alignment between state content standards could improve.

Benefits and Barriers of Media Literacy

Benefits Although there are studies suggesting the quantifiable benefits of media literacy, Scharrer (2003) suggests that more research is needed in testing outcomes of school media
literacy endeavors. Hobbs and Frost (2003), found that a group of 11th Grade English language arts students who received media literacy instruction for an entire school year improved their reading comprehension skills, demonstrated by the students’ improved abilities to identify main ideas, write longer paragraphs, and make fewer spelling mistakes when compared to a control group that did not receive media literacy instruction. Most importantly, students were “more likely to recognize the complex blurring of information, entertainment, and economics that are present in contemporary nonfiction media… [and] have a more nuanced understanding of interpreting textual evidence in different media formats” to identify the purpose and audience of the information (Hobbs & Frost, 2003, p. 351). Eken (2002) found that an eight-week course in film analysis provides students with skills “to look critically at other media texts such as commercials, television programs, and newspapers” (p. 226). Verkaik and Gathercoal (2001) concluded that a media literacy program improves comprehension of advertisements.

Sperry’s students scored an 85 percent and passed the New York standardized tests, even though he never directly addressed the specified content for the test (Sperry, 2006). He attributes the score to the cognitive developments spurred by his media literacy framework for teaching content, which included a three-month unit devoted to the European Holocaust and human nature studies (Sperry, 2006).

Other benefits of media literacy are apparent, if less quantifiable. Students of a media arts education program called Reach L.A., a non-school program in Los Angeles, discussed the emotional healing they felt by watching and discussing films about the lives of marginalized people and those who have been abused, and creating media products in their own voices addressing issues of racism, homophobia and poverty (Van Heertum & Share, 2006). In a supplementary school program with transnational Latina teens, action-researcher Vargas (2006)
suggested that dual-identity adolescents were better able to negotiate their identity questions through a media literacy program that emphasized bridging their Latin American roots with their emerging identities as a U.S. teen. Still, Van Heertum and Share (2006) caution that “multiple literacy education,” “not be seen as a panacea to all of the social problems faced by marginalized groups today” (p. 262).

A main benefit of media literacy is its effects on motivation and student engagement. Sperry (2006, p. 39) writes of a bright student who “hated school and had failed most standardized tests.” During media literacy, however, he “became engaged and reflective, demonstrating sophisticated thinking skills and an excellent memory for historical details. He gave insightful questions interpretations, asked key questions, identified bias, and backed up his comments with relevant details from the visual and written text” (Sperry (2006, p. 39).

It is often the visual learner, the ESL [English as a Second Language] student, and the Special Education student who jumps in with her or his analysis, pointing out critical details in the document to back up a conclusion. These students are often sharp thinkers, but have problems with traditional print decoding. Media literacy allows them to show their intellectual capabilities to the class, to the teacher and to themselves” (Sperry, 2006, p. 39).

**Barriers to Media Literacy**

As Hobbs (2005) noted, school policies may pose a barrier to teachers who want to use media in their classrooms. One district required that teachers obtain permission slips from all the students’ parents before showing a clip from a PG-rated film to a middle-school class. Other districts require teachers to submit video clips for principal approval as many as 20 days prior to classroom use. There are communities in which principals prohibit videotape and popular music,
and schools in which teachers must adhere to guidelines or follow bureaucratic approval processes to use any teaching material outside a list of school- or district- approved materials (Hobbs, 2005). Such issues can be major barriers to teachers who want to implement media literacy in their classrooms. Schwarz (2005) writes, “the ‘usual suspects,’ of course, also present threats to the growth of media literacy in the schools: time, resources, support, and school inequities” (p. 233).

Assessment and Evaluation

One of the crucial questions about media literacy is how to assess true learning (Van Heertum & Share, 2006; Kist, 2003). The National Middle School Association states that “assessments and evaluation should include both the process and the products of learning, taking into account student differences” (2003, p. 27). Kist (2003) discusses how teachers’ own “tensions” (p. 9) about achievement affect student assessment and evaluation in new literacy lessons. Both formal and informal measurements of learning are taking place in new literacy classrooms. Students have achieved literacy when they “become capable of both authoring and reading in media beyond print … (and) are able to have a conversation about (even deconstructing) different symbol systems” (Kist, 2003, p. 9-10). For evaluation, teachers of media literacy relied mainly on portfolios and reflection, sometimes with a rubric. According to Kist:

A crucial component of these assessments is that students must reflect on their own self-made goals. Students are assessed on their product achievement and their process achievement and complete a portfolio of their work in multimedia form, essentially creating a kind of electronic portfolio system” (2003, p. 11).
Implementation into Curriculum

State standardized testing must call for the values and skills promoted through media literacy and new literacies, according to Leu et al. (2004) and Mallette et al. (2005). If it’s on the state test, teachers will get the support and training they need to implement it into their curricula (Mallette et al, 2005). Ediger (2009) suggests that principals should guide and assist teachers with aligning their lessons to the learning objectives, or the academic content standards. In the words of Jenkins (2009): “Teachers need to count on their principals as resources of information on current trends and effective instructional practices. Instructional leaders are tuned in to issues relating to curriculum, effective pedagogical strategies, and assessment” (p. 36).

Interestingly, Bennett (1998) writes that the Educational Testing Service [ETS], the company that creates and implements testing in many educational facilities, is moving toward assessments that are highly individualized and diverse, and calls for “a critical understanding of how all texts (both print and nonprint) position [students] as readers and viewers within different social, cultural, and historical contexts” (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 193).

Media education is the closest literacy reform inroad currently gaining attention at the administrative and policy-making level in the U.S. The federal government has funded some grants for media education, although mostly in an effort to either protect youngsters from the harmful effects of media or to teach them to use technology, without the critical components of analysis and creation (Kellner & Share, 2007). Ohio Governor Ted Strickland recently signed a bill that requires the Ohio Academic Content Standards to specify “skills that promote information, media, and technological literacy” (Ohio House Bill No. 1, 2009, pp. 4-5).

Teacher training opportunities are available through workshops with the New Mexico Media Literacy Project and Project Look Sharp in Ithaca, New York, as well as through some
universities. While communications programs do offer critical media coursework, these are less accessible to teachers in training. Universities providing media literacy certificate programs or coursework include Appalachian State University in North Carolina, Webster University in Missouri, Temple University in Philadelphia and the University of Southern California (Kellner and Share, 2007). Goezte, Brown, and Schwarz (2005) write that “there remains a need for more opportunities of all kinds for both pre-and in-service teachers to learn about media literacy. Professional development for practicing teachers, whether through projects or through graduate work, may be the most effective route to teaching about media literacy.” (p. 177).

Summary

Although many in the U.S. find media literacy a relatively new concept, countries including Germany, England, and Australia have included it in school curricula for decades (Aufderheide, 1992). In the last decade in the U.S., media literacy has become part of a dialogue about new literacies, which addresses student preparation for the demands of the 21st century workplace, including technological, cultural, and information-gathering proficiencies (Jewitt, 2008). Proponents of new literacies suggest that using a variety of forms of media and technology, as well as inquiry, reflection, dialogue, collaboration, and media creation motivate students and make content relevant to student interests (Kist, 2003).

Some educators react positively to the idea of merging new literacies and basic literacies, which include print text decoding, comprehension, fluency, and writing (Mallette et al, 2005). Other studies show a gap between students’ actual literacy practices (such as corresponding by e-mail, reading magazines and fiction, and using the Internet and magazines to get information) and in-school literacy practices, reinforcing misperceptions that many adolescents don’t read well or read infrequently (Pitcher et al., 2007). Media literacy, with its reliance on multiple forms
of text and technology, is viewed by some educators as motivational and student-centered,
building higher-order thinking skills and global awareness (Sperry, 2006).

Indeed, media literacy is unique from other forms of new literacy, with its roots in
sociocritical theory and critical literacy (Luke, 2007) manifested through media literacy’s
emphasis on questioning a text’s intended messages, deconstructing the content of a text, and
valuing various reader perspectives, linguistic choices and points of view, as well as
understanding that most media messages are created to gain power or money (Center for Media
Literacy, 2007). Economic and social justice are important components of media literacy
(Semali, 2001), and democratic values and the implications of globalization serve as the
foundation (Luke, 2007). Those who teach media literacy skills or focus on media literacy as an
outcome with adolescents depend on a variety of texts, pop culture, reflection, analysis,
identify a lack of directive texts and processes for teaching media literacy, resulting in a number
of questions and possibilities about its role in schools.

However, studies examining the effect of media literacy instruction with adolescents cite
a number of benefits. Such benefits include improvements in reading comprehension skills
(Hobbs & Frost, 2003) and better understanding of advertisements (Verkaik & Gathercoal,
2001). Anecdotal evidence of benefits include higher standardized test scores and motivation to
participate in class (Sperry, 2006); identity development (Vargas, 2006); improvement of
emotional well-being (Van Heertum & Share, 2006); as well as a way to connect with ESL
speakers (Vargas, 2006) and students with special needs (Sperry, 2006; Mitchie, 1999).

Because media literacy is a relatively new area in the U.S. education system, unresolved
issues include questions of how to fairly assess learning and measure achievement (Kist, 2003),
and how to widely implement media literacy into classrooms in the current era of high-stakes standardized testing (Leu et al, 2004). A major barrier is the lack of coursework in teacher preparation programs teaching about media literacy (Goezte, Brown, & Schwarz, 2005). Teachers need principal support in order to effectively include media literacy instruction in their classrooms (Ediger, 2009; Jenkins, 2009). The role of principals in promoting media literacy remains unstudied.

This chapter discussed how media literacy in the United States has developed as an important part of the movement toward new literacies. It also looked at a variety of methods of instruction, texts, learning evaluation techniques, and the use of different forms of media among educators pursuing media literacy in their classrooms. In addition, this chapter reviewed some of the most prevalent barriers to more widespread media literacy implementation in U.S. public schools, which include a lack of educator preparedness, questions of how to evaluate learning, bureaucratic barriers to using relevant forms of media, and the need for state standards to call for media literacy instruction in order for the topic to receive greater attention, in addition to time and resources [Schwarz, 2005].

Chapter Three, Methods, will describe how this study, “Media Literacy and the Ohio Academic Content Standards,” examined Ohio principals’ perceptions of media literacy and the Ohio Academic Content Standards in Ohio public schools. The results, conclusions, and implications of this study will be reported in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

Researchers and teachers have identified many benefits of media literacy instruction (Van Heertum & Share, 2006; Vargas, 2006; Sperry, 2006; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Verkaik & Gathercoal, 2001; Mitchie, 1999). Teachers advocating for media literacy have begun implementing it into their classroom practices (Hobbs, 2005), although practical barriers such as time, support, resources, and training can impede effective media literacy instruction (Goezte, Brown, & Schwarz, 2005; Schwarz, 2005). A main question emerging from research is how to implement media literacy into school curricula on a wider basis (Semali, 2001). Stein and Prewett (2009) have noted that “few researchers have focused on its implementation” (p. 232).

Each state sets its own content standards through political administration (Porter & Polikoff, 2009), which drives instruction and school curricula. Ediger (2009) suggests that principals should guide and assist teachers with aligning their lessons to learning objectives. Principals should be “tuned in to issues relating to curriculum, effective pedagogical strategies, and assessment” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 36). Kinney (2009) suggests that principals influence school literacy instruction though teacher training, support, and resource provisions, but very little is known about principals’ perceptions of media literacy, particularly relating to curricula and literacy instruction in general. Thus, the primary purpose of this Master’s Research Project is to begin shedding light on how principals view media literacy. The two main research questions guiding this study were:
1.) To what extent do Ohio middle school principals perceive the Ohio Academic Content Standards to promote media literacy?

2.) What are Ohio middle school principals’ perspectives on the impact of barriers to media literacy on literacy instruction?

This is an exploratory study of a cross-section of Ohio middle school principals. It utilized a survey and descriptive statistical methods to begin answering the questions above. This chapter will discuss the study methods, including the population, data collection and analysis.

Population

According to Mulhahall, Flowers and Mertens (2004, p. 58), “much has been written and recommended regarding the critical role of the principal as a transformational leader in the educational success of middle grade students (Anfara, Andrews, Hough, Mertens, Mizelle & White, 2003; Clark & Clark, 2002; Jackson & Davis, 2000).” Mulhahall, Flowers and Mertens (2004) also name principals as “the cornerstone of effective education” (p. 61). In addition, principals should stay current with curriculum, instruction, and assessment (DuFour, 2002).

Because of the principal’s important role in student learning and maintaining up-to-date teaching practices at the middle school level, I chose principals as the population for this study.

It was feasible to send out 110 surveys, which was less than 1% of all Ohio schools. As my study depended on the participants to return a survey by mail, I sought the largest initial sample resources allowed. Kahn and Best (2005) write: “In mailed questionnaire studies, because the percentage of responses may be as low as 20 to 30, a large initial sample should be selected to receive the mailing that so that the number of questionnaires returned is large enough to enable researchers to have a small sampling error” (p. 20).
I began identifying a sample pool using a comprehensive list of Ohio schools in the form of an Excel workbook, which I downloaded from the Ohio Department of Education [ODE] website. It contains academic and demographic data for all public elementary, middle, and high schools in Ohio, including each school’s Local Report Card status. I limited the participants to principals whose schools included at least one middle grade, which are grades 5-8. Because these grades can be grouped with elementary and high schools, some principals in the study work at high schools or elementary schools.

In order to subdivide the population pool to obtain a stratified random sample, I used the “sort and filter” tool in Excel to group the schools. I chose to group them according to their 2007-8 Ohio Department of Education [ODE] rating, the most recent available at the time of this study. I used the following groups: “academic watch/emergency,” “continuous improvement,” “effective,” and “excellent/excellent with distinction.” The ODE ratings are based on performance and the meeting of goals and indicators. These ratings are applicable to each district and school building (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). The ODE ratings are used as well for accountability with regard to federal education mandates (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). Although these categories are not generally used to establish subsets in educational research, I hypothesized this method might provide information on a possible relationship between school rating and principals’ perceptions of literacy.

Grouping the schools by their ODE rating provided smaller groups that more accurately represent Ohio schools. In order to obtain the initial stratified sample, I used a method of random number selection, a common selection procedure (Best & Kahn, 2006). Each school listed in the Excel workbook had a corresponding number as part of Excel’s data organization. I generated random numbers through the website http://www.random.org/integers/. This generator allows
users to assign a range of values from which it generates numbers. Using this feature allowed me to obtain random numbers for each subgroup of the population; for example, if schools 1-100 were rated “excellent,” and I needed 25 “excellent” schools, I used the random integer generator to generate 25 numbers between 1 and 100. The school corresponding to each number generated was selected for the initial stratified sample. I repeated this procedure for each subgroup in the study in order to obtain a stratified random sample of Ohio school principals. This resulted in a sample of 110 principals. The survey was mailed in the spring, with a cover letter, instructions, consent forms guaranteeing anonymity, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. A total of 23 out of 110 surveys were returned, yielding an overall response rate of 20.9%. The response rate was possibly affected by the fact that the surveys were sent out during late spring when some schools were nearing the end of the academic year.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ODE Rating (2007-8 school year)</th>
<th>Surveys Sent n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Surveys Returned N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(schools)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(invitees)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Watch / Emergency</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent/Excellent with Distinction</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 1 shows, the returned surveys resulted in two groups of only 3 principals, one group of 9 principals, and one group of 8. Therefore, I combined the subgroups in order to create two larger categories of principals. The “academic watch/emergency” and “continuous improvement” subgroups were combined to form a new group, principals of lower-performing schools. The “effective” and “excellent/excellent with distinction” subgroups were combined to form a new group, principals of higher-performing schools. With this change, the principals in this study were categorized into principals of higher-performing schools (n=17) and principals of lower-performing schools (n=6). This allowed for improved comparison between groups while maintaining stratified sample.

Data Collection

The method of data collection in this study was a survey which, according to Best and Kahn (2006), is a useful method for analyzing conditions. It emphasizes individuals more than characteristics and “is essentially cross-sectional” (p. 121). The survey method is also convenient, relatively inexpensive, and compatible with the objectives of different types of research design (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

As Gall et al. (2003) recommend, I completed an exhaustive search for previous studies utilizing surveys to assess principals’ perspectives of media literacy. However, no previous study utilized a survey similar to or meeting the needs of this Master Research Project. Gall et al. (2003, p. 216) writes that “development of new tests is a complex and difficult process,” especially for novice researchers and students. For the purposes of this study, though, a survey was crucial. Thus, I designed one to fit the parameters of the project. The survey included a total of 16 questions, nine of them utilizing a Likert scale and two open-ended questions. The remaining five questions were related to the respondents’ demographics (See Appendix A).
The Likert scale constitutes the quantitative component of this study. A Likert scale, according to Gall et al. (2003), “asks individuals to check their level of agreement (e.g., strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree) with various statements” (p. 214). According to Best and Kahn (2006), the Likert-type scale is valuable because it is efficient and results are comparable to those obtained by other methods of attitude assessment.

The Likert scale sought principals’ perceptions of media literacy regarding the Ohio Academic Content Standards, barriers to media literacy, and literacy in general. However, I generally did not use the term “media literacy” explicitly because media literacy is a relatively new concept to many (Schwarz, 2005), and effective surveys avoid ambiguous terms (Best & Kahn, 2006). In addition, I wanted to make sure that the survey question was not leading, as Best & Kahn (2006) recommend. This information, therefore, was sought through the use of subquestions that did not refer explicitly to media literacy but referred to common media literacy practices and techniques. For example, Question One stated, “The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote, by the end of the K-12 program: Students’ ability to understand, evaluate, analyze, and access information in a variety of forms.” The ability to understand, evaluate, analyze, and access information is considered a crux of media literacy instruction (Aufderheide, 1992). Another four subquestions were drafted the same way, by using the criteria for media literacy instruction as discussed in Chapter Two: creating texts in different forms of media (Kist, 2003); examining students’ communities or situations from their own perspectives (Vargas, 2006; Mitchie, 1999); evaluating learning by projects and portfolios instead of standardized tests (Kist, 2003); and using different sources and a variety of forms to understand, evaluate, analyze, and access information (Sperry, 2005). The last of the nine Likert-style questions did ask respondents directly if revision of the OACS to promote media literacy would
improve literacy instruction. However, the rest of the survey avoided the use of “media literacy” to avoid ambiguous terms and leading questions (Best & Kahn, 2006). In addition, the cover letter and the survey instructions also referred to literacy in general terms rather than specifically to media literacy.

The possible responses for the first part of the Likert survey, seeking responses to the question, “To what extent do the Ohio Academic Content Standards promote media literacy?” were: strongly agree (1); agree (2); neutral (3); disagree (4); and strongly disagree (5). Each response was assigned a corresponding numerical value, as commonly done with Likert scales (Best & Kahn, 2006). Responses agreeing with the viewpoint corresponded with lower numerical values; disagreeing statements had the highest numerical values.

The second part of the Likert-style questions sought to answer the second research question, “What are Ohio middle school principals’ perspectives on the impact of barriers to media literacy on literacy instruction?” Again, this question was not asked explicitly, but four subquestions were used instead. These statements were based on the prevalent barriers to media literacy instruction, as discussed in Chapter Two: training to teach media literacy (Goezete et al., 2005); the pressure to follow curriculum aligned with state standardized testing (Leu et al., 2004; Mallette et al., 2005); funding (Schwarz, 2005); and access to technological resources (Schwarz, 2005). The corresponding numeric values were reversed, however, as follows: strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neutral (3); agree (4); and strongly agree (5). In this section, responses disagreeing with the viewpoint corresponded with lower numerical values; agreeing statements had the highest numerical values.

In addition to the nine Likert-style questions, the survey included two open-ended questions. As the Likert-style responses were analyzed quantitatively, the open-ended questions
were analyzed qualitatively. Best and Kahn (2006) state that, “a single survey will often contain
questions that provide for quantitative responses and also ask questions that result in qualitative
data” (p. 272). Furthermore, Best and Kahn (2006) suggest that, “qualitative and quantitative
research should be considered as a continuum rather than a mutually exclusive dichotomy” (p.
271). The two open-ended questions were:

1. What is your definition of literacy? (Please do not go back and change this answer)
2. Do you think there is a need to redefine literacy? If so, how? If not, why not?

I wrote these two questions from a positivist/realist approach, which is explained by Best
and Kahn (2006) as an inquiry about the “real world” condition. I advised participants not to go
back and change the answer to the first question because it was positioned in the beginning of the
survey, and completing the survey might likely affect their concept of literacy. I included these
two questions to provide the participants a voice in their responses and to add texture and
perspective to the results. As Best and Kahn (2006) wrote, “the open form probably provides for
greater depth of response.”

Data Analysis

Each survey was color-coded, a strategy which greatly assisted with data organization
and analysis. Data from each of the 23 returned surveys was entered into the statistical software
program SPSS for analysis. Data was organized and coded as follows: Each survey was assigned
an identification number. The responses to each Likert-style question were coded according the
value scales described above. This code was entered into the SPSS workbook. Statistical analysis
was conducted to show frequency, mean, and measures of dispersion including range, minimum,
maximum, and standard deviation. This analysis was conducted first for the whole group and
next for the subgroups.
The open-ended responses were analyzed according to a method described by Gall et al. (2003). First, I read all the respondents’ answers and developed a set of categories based on the answers. In addition, my academic advisor, an associate professor of social studies education, read all the answers and developed his own set of categories. Next we reconciled our initial categories. These categories are discussed in the Findings chapter of this study, with the principals’ responses also used to provide texture and first-person perspectives.

Summary

Although media literacy is growing rapidly as field of research (Fox, 2005), there is little known about its wider implementation in school curricula (Stein & Prewett, 2009). School principals play an important role in keeping teachers current with curriculum (DuFour, 2002) and are crucial for effective education (Mulhahall, et al, 2004). For these two reasons I chose them as the population for this study.

The main purpose of this Master Research Project is to begin to understand how principals in Ohio view media literacy. The method for data collection in this study was a survey.

The principals, all working in Ohio schools at the time of this study, comprised two subgroups based on their schools’ academic ratings: principals of higher-performing schools and principals of lower-performing schools. Data was statistically analyzed to show the following measures: central tendency (mean, median, and mode); dispersion (range, variance, and standard deviation). The two open-ended questions were categorized and used to provide texture and perspective in the Findings Chapter. Chapter Four will present the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Classrooms in the United States are beginning address to the need for media literacy, with some teachers taking steps to help students become aware of the significant influences of media in their lives (Hobbs, 2005). Still, little is known about the implementation of media literacy in school curricula on wider basis (Stein & Prewett, 2009; Semali, 2001). Because school principals play an important role in curriculum practices (DuFour, 2002), this exploratory study examined how principals of middle schools in Ohio perceive media literacy and literacy in general. The two main research questions guiding this study were:

1.) To what extent do Ohio middle school principals perceive the Ohio Academic Content Standards to promote media literacy?

2.) What are Ohio middle school principals’ perspectives on the impact of barriers to media literacy on literacy instruction?

Data was gathered from a survey of 23 Ohio middle school principals. (For a copy of the survey, see Appendix A). The principals’ responses were analyzed to find the frequency, measures of central tendency and dispersion to answer the research questions. Two open-ended questions were used to qualify the responses of the Likert-style questions. Based on their school’s performance during the 2007-08 academic year on the standardized state test, the principals were put into two groups that represent schools with high performance (n=17) and schools with low performance (n=6). The schools with high performance achieved a status of
“excellent,” “excellent with distinction,” or “effective” on their 2007-08 Local Report Cards through the Ohio Department of Education. The schools with low performance earned a status of either “continuous improvement,” “academic watch” or “academic emergency” on their 2007-08 Local Report Cards. The ODE ratings are used as well for accountability with regard to federal education mandates (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). Utilizing the schools’ ODE ratings for categorization provided information on the relationships between school rating and principals’ perceptions of literacy.

This chapter discusses the findings based on the principals’ perceptions of the following areas: media literacy in the Ohio Academic Content Standards; media literacy and literacy instruction; redefining literacy; and changing views on literacy. This chapter also includes a section discussing the relationship between principals’ perceptions of literacy and their school’s performance.

Media Literacy in the Ohio Academic Content Standards

As the Ohio Academic Content Standards [OACS] play a critical role in determining the content and skills that are taught at the building level (Mallette et al., 2005), this study asked whether Ohio principals perceive the OACS to effectively promote media literacy. This question was addressed through five Likert-style questions in the survey. The mean of responses correlate to the Likert scale as follows: 1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=neutral; 4=disagree; and 5=strongly disagree.

The principals in this study expressed a mostly neutral opinion about the OACS promotion of media literacy [mean=2.64]. Although principals from both high-performing and low-performing schools generally were neutral in their opinion about whether the OACS
promote media literacy skills, those from higher-performing schools agreed with the statements more so [mean=2.5] than principals from schools with lower performance [mean=3.1].

Principals most frequently either agreed with or were neutral with regard to whether the OACS promote the five areas of media literacy instruction that are considered most pertinent to a media literacy curriculum: student use of information; student creation of media; teacher ability to evaluate student learning from projects and portfolios (rather than pencil-and-paper tests); student ability to understand information’s ideology; and student ability to critique and empower their communities (See Appendix B). The principals most frequently agreed with the statement that the OACS promote student use of information, with 83% of principals (16 of the 17 principals of high-performing schools; 4 of the 6 principals of low-performing schools) agreeing that the OACS promote student use of information. On the other hand, principals disagreed most frequently with the statement that the OACS promote evaluation of student learning by projects and portfolios, with 39% of principals (4 of 17 from high-performing schools; 5 of 6 from lower-performing schools) disagreeing. Media literacy proponents consider alternative forms of student evaluation a critical feature of effective instruction. Another 39% agreed that the OACS promote such alternative evaluations (8 of 17 from high-performing schools; 1 of six from low-performing). (See Chart Five, Appendix B).

While principals in both categories generally expressed the same opinions, there were two categories in which they differed: understanding of information’s ideology, and teacher ability to evaluate student learning from projects and portfolios. Principals from schools with higher performance agreed that the OACS promote understanding of ideology [mean=2.4], whereas principals from schools with lower performance were neutral [mean=3.0]. In addition, principals from higher performing schools were neutral regarding the OACS promotion of
student evaluation from projects and portfolios [mean=2.8]; principals from schools with lower performance disagreed that the OACS promote student evaluation from projects and portfolios [mean=3.8]. Although the principals differed by category on these two questions, in both cases principals from higher performing schools expressed agreement that the OACS promote these skills; principals from schools with lower performance indicated that the OACS do not promote these skills. This finding supports the conclusion that principals from higher-performing schools were slightly more in agreement with the notion that the OACS promote media literacy than principals from lower-performing schools. As well, principals of lower-performing schools hold a lower perception of the OACS promoting media literacy. This difference may well reflect differences in interpretation of the survey items. However, this difference also could reflect differences in overall attitudes toward or interpretation of the OACS. In this case, the findings of this study would support the notion that principals of higher-performing schools have a more flexible perception of the OACS, because they identify the OACS to have more components of media literacy. Further research into the attitudes of Ohio principals regarding the OACS, literacy, and media literacy could provide interesting information about this possible relationship.

Media Literacy and Literacy Instruction

Media literacy is considered a form of new literacy, which is a broader concept of literacy as transmitting important skill sets and competencies students need to negotiate the technological changes and information proliferation of 21st century (Semali, 2001). Hobbs and Frost (2005) identified an increased interest in school media literacy in recent years, although according to Stein and Prewitt (2009), little is known about the actual implementation of media literacy into a school environment. Other research shows that teachers continue to focus on basic literacy skills,
such as “reading comprehension, vocabulary, word identification, fluency, writing, at-risk students, and literature in the content areas” (Mallette, et al., 2005 p. 37). Many studies have looked at techniques to improve student literacy, but one remaining question is the relationship between media literacy and literacy improvement in school environments. Thus, an important part of this study sought principals’ opinions on the extent to which media literacy could improve literacy instruction in schools.

I addressed principals’ opinions of media literacy as a venue to improved school literacy instruction through four Likert-style questions. The principals’ opinions in this part of the survey correlated to mean values as follows: strongly disagree=1; disagree=2; neutral=3; agree=4; and strongly agree=5. Each of the four questions dealt with prevalent barriers to media literacy: access to technological resources; teacher training; funding; and revision of the OACS to promote media literacy. These barriers can impede media literacy instruction in school (Goezte, Brown, & Schwarz, 2005; Schwarz, 2005). In addition, because of the importance of students gaining media and technology skills and becoming informationally-proficient to succeed in the 21st century workforce (Semali, 2001), a growing number of educators and researchers are recommending media literacy as an integral part of school curricula, as discussed in Chapter Two of this study. This study, therefore, identified a connection between barriers to media literacy and successful school literacy programs.

The principals in this study agreed that media literacy would improve literacy instruction, with principals of higher-performing schools expressing stronger agreement (mean=3.9) than principals from lower-performing schools [mean=3.5]. The responses to the specific Likert-style questions found that principals from lower-performing schools were neutral to the suggestion of revising the OACS to promote media literacy [mean=3.2]. This group also was neutral to the
idea that creating better access to technological resources [mean=3.3] would improve literacy instruction (See Appendix C). These two barriers to media literacy, OACS revision and access to technology, were the only items with which principals disagreed. Both groups of principals agreed that bolstering funding and educator training would improve school literacy instruction. A principal from a high-performing school who answered “neutral” to the possibility of revising the OACS entered an interesting response in explanation: “Literacy instruction is only as good as the teacher standing in front of the room.” Although this response does not suggest either a pro- or con- media literacy attitude, the principal’s written comment suggests the importance of the teacher in literacy improvement, a value likely shared by other principals in the study.

Another finding from this study is that both groups of principals overwhelmingly agreed that increased funding to train, hire educators and technological support personnel, and purchase and maintain technology would improve school literacy instruction [higher-performing=4.3; lower-performing=3.8]. According to Schwarz (2005, citing Anderson & Ploghoft, 1993), funding was a major cause of the demise of media literacy in the 1970s and continues to be a hurdle in media literacy programs (Goezte, Brown, & Schwarz, 2005).

Principals from higher-performing schools and lower-performing schools expressed notably different opinions on two items related to media literacy and literacy instruction. They disagreed in their assessment of the issue of access to technological resources and revising the OACS. While principals from schools with higher performance identified access to technological resources as a key to improved literacy instruction [mean=3.8], principals from schools with lower performance were more neutral on this item [mean=3.3]. This difference between the two groups suggests that principals from higher-performing schools may well place a higher value on student use of technology in schools. Furthermore, principals from lower-performing schools
may also place a high value on technology, but this group may not identify a link between technology and literacy.

In addition, principals from schools with higher performance agreed more with the statement that revising the OACS to promote media literacy skills would improve literacy instruction [mean=3.7] than principals from schools with lower-performance [mean=3.2]. This finding also supports the finding, discussed earlier in this chapter, that principals from higher-performing and lower-performing schools have different attitudes or interpretations of the OACS. In this case, though, the finding suggests that the principals from higher-performing schools perceive the OACS to play an important role in classroom instruction. Another possibility is that principals of lower-performing schools may not see OACS revision as a way to improve literacy instruction. The principals’ responses to the open-ended question about revising the OACS to promote media literacy, however, suggest other reasons. Of the four of six principals from lower-performing schools who answered this question, two explicitly called for revising the OACS – one to include “comprehensive reading” and one to create “deeper” literacy strands. Of the other two respondents, one called for more school funding to promote student success throughout all subject areas, not commenting on media literacy or the OACS at all. The other respondent wrote: “Depends on what the definition being used is. Yes, media should be a part but I think it is naturally a part of reading, writing & communicating.” This principal seems to appreciate at least one aspect of media literacy, media, as a way to improve literacy instruction, but he or she does not convey an understanding of media literacy or his or her attitude toward it.
Redefining Literacy

Because of the important role the academic content standards play in driving classroom instruction (Ediger, 2009), I also sought principals’ opinions on whether they thought there was a need to redefine literacy. Six of the 23 principals in this study did not answer the question. Of the remaining 17 responses, 3 principals totally opposed redefining literacy. The fourteen principals who did not directly oppose redefining literacy, however, wrote a variety of responses that ranged from advocating the redefinition of literacy in order to promote media literacy, to responses that somewhat promoted media literacy, or voiced concern about other issues in schools, such as students’ emotional needs.

However, nearly half of the 17 principals who answered the open-ended questions suggested that new technologies and media, as well as 21st century skills, are important reasons for redefining literacy. Half of the principals from high-performing schools (50%) made this argument while about 40% of principals of low-performing schools did so as well. “Absolutely [redefine literacy],” wrote one principal. “Currently the scope often ignores 21st century skills required for students to be successful in a global economy.” Another principal wrote, “Yes [redefine literacy], to better reflect the 21st century and integrate the technology knowledge and skills that our students – a.k.a. ‘digital natives’ – possess and need for their future endeavors,” suggested another. Yet another principal suggested that a redefinition of literacy could improve student motivation to attend school, writing: “In the 21st century we must make learning exciting in order that our students want to come to school. Technology is the key to move instruction forward in the 21st century.”

In addition, a few principals suggested that the definition of literacy should be reconsidered, but for reasons other than technology, media, or 21st century skills. These
principals suggested a need for curriculum changes, or more intervention or emotional support for students, or more money. For example, one principal wrote, “I believe our students would benefit greatly from redefining literacy. It is my belief that the current content standards cover broad areas of content without developing a deep, meaningful understanding of them…” This principal, thus, considers media literacy less important to literacy improvement than a more focused set of content standards.

The analysis of the open-ended responses also revealed that principals of higher-performing schools expressed a greater interested in redefining literacy to promote media literacy than principals of lower-performing schools. Of the 17 principals of higher-performing schools included in this study, eight suggested the need for technology and/or media specifically. Four principals from higher-performing schools did not answer at all and three opposed redefining literacy. Another two of the 17 principals addressed student literacy needs in other frameworks: “It doesn’t matter if literacy is media, technology or print – if you can’t read what is written or shown and comprehend the symbols, you are not literate,” wrote one principal. The other one wrote about the importance of addressing students’ personal “baggage” through additional guidance and teacher support in order to maximize learning. Thus, of the 13 principals of higher-performing schools who answered this question, eight (62%) advocated redefining literacy to include more aspects of media literacy.

The principals of lower-performing schools, on the other hand, expressed much less certainty about redefining literacy, according to their responses. Of the six principals from lower-performing schools, two did not answer this question. Two addressed students’ literacy needs in different frameworks, one suggesting that greater funding is the key to promoting student literacy, the second suggesting that students would benefit from redefining literacy, but not to
promote media literacy: “I believe our students would benefit greatly from redefining literacy. It is my belief that the current content standards cover broad areas of content without developing a deep, meaningful understanding of them…” he or she wrote. The other two of the six principals from lower-performing schools, however, did suggest the need for technology and media in the content standards to improve student literacy. Thus, two of six (30%) principals from lower-performing and 62% of principals from higher-performing schools believed redefining literacy would benefit student literacy.

Changing Views on Literacy

In this study, principals’ views on the importance of technology and media seemed to evolve as they completed the survey. Initially, they offered their own definition of literacy. They were specifically asked not to go back and change their response to this definition in order to elicit more honest answers. In their initial response, all 23 wrote basic definitions of literacy such as “reading and writing” or “the ability to communicate,” and comprehension or “understanding.” Three respondents, however, did mention competencies associated with media literacy (accessing and analyzing information, creation of products, and multimedia.) After completing the survey, however, nearly half of the principals who answered both questions (8 out of 17) appeared to change their concept of literacy. For example, a principal originally defined literacy as, “the ability to read and write and communicate using these skills.” After answering the survey, he or she wrote: “Literacy now involves many different venues. Technology has changed literacy to a certain degree on how people communicate.” Another principal initially defined literacy as “a student’s ability to process text/information in a logical manner…” After completing the survey, he or she wrote, “Absolutely [redefine literacy] - currently the scope often ignores 21st Century skills required for students to be successful in a
global economy.” Thus it appears that completing the survey affected these principals’ notion of literacy.

Perceptions of Literacy and School Performance

In this study, I hypothesized that there is a relationship between principals’ perceptions of literacy and their school’s performance. Through analysis of this study’s 23 principals’ responses to the Likert-scale questions and the two open-ended questions, a relationship between their perceptions of literacy and school performance did indeed emerge.

According to the principals’ responses to the Likert-style questions regarding the OACS promotion of media literacy, principals from higher-performing were slightly more in agreement that the OACS promote media literacy than principals from lower-performing schools, with means of 2.5 and 3.1. Converted to the Likert scale, these are both neutral scores, but the 2.5 mean of principals of higher-performing schools is slightly closer to agreement than the principals of lower-performing schools mean of 3.1. Next, there was an identifiable difference in the perceptions of the two groups of principals on whether media literacy would improve literacy instruction. The principals of higher-performing schools agreed with this notion, with a mean of 3.9. (In this part of the survey, as explained previously, the Likert-scale was reversed, with a 1 equating “strongly disagree;” 3, “neutral;” and 5, “strongly agree.”) The principals of lower-performing schools also agreed, but with a mean of only 3.5. Finally, on the open-ended responses, 62% of principals from higher-performing schools suggested a need to redefine literacy to promote media literacy, and only 30% of principals from lower-performing schools did as well. In all three areas of this study – media literacy and the OACS, media literacy and literacy instruction, and redefining literacy to promote media literacy – principals from higher-performing schools expressed a more pro-media literacy attitude than the principals from lower-
performing schools. The principals from higher performing schools identified more alignment between aspects of media literacy and the OACS. They expressed stronger agreement with the notion that media literacy would improve school literacy instruction. They, furthermore, suggested more frequently that students would benefit from redefining literacy to include skills and knowledge associated with media literacy.

These differences between the principals of higher-performing and lower-performing schools provide evidence that a relationship does indeed exist between principals’ perceptions of literacy and their school performance. These differences could be attributed to a number of factors such as: differences in interpretations and attitudes of the OACS or this survey, or the size of the two groups in this study (n=17 of principals of higher-performing schools; n=6 of lower-performing schools). As this study sought to begin exploring the perceptions of Ohio middle school principals regarding media literacy and literacy in general, its findings on principals’ perceptions of literacy and school performance would make an interesting and beneficial future study.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of a study of middle school principals’ perceptions of the OACS and media literacy, media literacy and literacy instruction, redefining literacy, and changing views on literacy. They were divided into two groups based on their 2007-08 academic report card by the ODE, representing schools of high performance (n=17) and schools (n=6) of lower performance.

This study found that principals from both higher- and lower-performing schools believed literacy instruction would improve if schools improved barriers to media literacy, especially funding for media-literacy related instruction and equipment, and professional
development or training for teachers to use media in the classroom. In addition, both sets of principals were neutral about whether the OACS effectively promote media literacy skills. About half of all principals in this study (62% of those from higher-performing schools and 30% from lower-performing schools) suggested that redefining literacy to include media, technology, and 21st Century skills would benefit student literacy.

The findings from this study suggest that a relationship exists between principals’ perceptions of literacy and their school’s performance. Principals of higher-performing schools more frequently agreed that the OACS promote media literacy; that school literacy instruction would improve with media literacy; and that literacy should be redefined to include more media and technology. These differences in perception between the principals from higher-performing and lower-performing schools could provide interesting findings for future research in the area of media literacy, literacy in general or principal leadership.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Media literacy is a type of new literacy that has gained increasing attention in the last few years. Media literacy has been defined as a “framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms” (Center for Media Literacy, 2009, Media Literacy: A definition ... and more section ¶2). Long practiced in several countries outside the United States (Luke, 2007; Schwarz, 2005; Aufderheide, 1992), media literacy is increasingly recognized in the U.S. for its many educational benefits to students. Such benefits include improved reading comprehension, spelling, and writing stamina when compared to students who do not study media literacy (Hobbs and Frost, 2003); improved critical analysis of media messages (Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Eken, 2002); improved comprehension of advertisements (Verkaik and Gathercoal, 2001); emotional healing (Van Heertum & Share, 2006); identity development (Vargas, 2006); and motivation to attend school (Sperry, 2006). Schwarz (2005) writes that proponents believe media literacy can “transform curriculum, teaching, and even society” (p. 6).

Although educational research in media literacy has grown in recent years (Fox, 2005), few researchers have studied media literacy’s implementation in school settings (Stein & Prewett, 2009). Previous research has found that teachers lead the effort to bring media literacy into classrooms (Hobbs, 2005). Although school principals are generally responsible for guiding curriculum implementation and leading instructional practices (Kinney, 2009), little is known about their opinions of media literacy. Principals’ duties have evolved from curriculum
development and instruction to responsibility for the overall effectiveness of the school (Hallinger, 2003), especially as standards-based reforms have become the foundation of public education in the last decade (Hallinger, 2005). Nevertheless, principals are still considered key players for school change and influence (Jenkins, 2009; Hallinger, 2005). Principal support is critical in any curriculum change, such as media literacy (Ediger, 2009; Jenkins, 2009).

Because of the importance of principals, this study examined their views of media literacy. This Master’s Research Project is an exploratory study intended to begin understand principals’ perceptions of media literacy. It addressed Ohio middle school principals’ perceptions of media literacy, the Ohio curriculum and literacy practices in general. This chapter summarizes the findings, presents the conclusions of this study, and offers recommendations. The research questions that guided this study were:

1.) To what extent do Ohio middle school principals perceive the Ohio Academic Content Standards to promote media literacy?

2.) What are Ohio middle school principals’ perspectives on the impact of barriers to media literacy on literacy instruction?

Data was gathered from a survey of 23 Ohio middle school principals. I chose principals because of their critical role in school achievement, and because Ohio middle schools are my area of interest. Based on their school’s performance during the 2007-08 academic year on the standardized state test, the principals were categorized into two groups to represent schools with high performance (n=17) and schools with low performance (n=6). The survey consisted of nine Likert-style items and two open-ended questions. The principals’ responses were analyzed to find frequency, measures of central tendency and dispersion.
Conclusions

As previous studies have identified benefits of media literacy instruction, weaknesses in school literacy programs have also been discussed in earlier research. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that student reading motivation declines through middle and secondary school, partly because school reading assignments fail to meet student preferences. Pitcher et.al (2007) found a discrepancy between school literacy practices and students’ actual out-of-school literacies. While students today interact heavily with many types of new media, including the Internet and online writing forums, even creating Internet content (Rainie, 2009), teachers and students often don’t associate such practices with academic literacy (Pitcher, et al., 2007). Television shows, songs, and movies representing pop culture can, according to Mitchie (1999), provide a “richer and more multilayered [text] than the textbooks and basal readers that clutter classroom shelves” (p. 95). News magazines and Internet sites can serve as texts for content knowledge, social studies skills, vocabulary, and comprehension (Sperry, 2006). Yet, Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis found that educators distinguish between “recreational” and “academic” activities in choosing instructional resources, even if a resource they think is recreational may better reach students (as cited by Harris, 2008, p. 251). Teachers also express hesitation and fear about bringing pop culture into their classrooms (Morrell, 2002), perhaps in part due to the discouragement of some administrators (Hobbs, 2005). Thus, school literacy programs can lead to a lack of student motivation (Ivey, 2008) and less-than-effective instructional resources (Harris, 2008).

The National Middle School Association suggests that middle school instruction should “enhance and accommodate the diverse skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents, cultivate multiple intelligences, and draw upon students’ individual learning styles” (NMSA, 2003, p. 25). Pitcher et al. (2007) suggests that educators and administrators “recognize
the multiple literacies in which students engage outside of the classroom and find ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction,” (p. 394) as well as provide students more choice in reading and projects, and bring to classrooms a wider variety of text formats, topics, skill levels, and literature circles and book clubs. While teachers such as Mitchie (1999), Sperry (2006) and others (Kist, 2003), are implementing media, pop culture, and technology as a way to activate adolescents’ prior knowledge and individual learning styles, more can be done to enhance student literacy, as the principals in this study also indicated.

This study found that Ohio middle school principals believe that literacy instruction would improve if schools had fewer barriers to media literacy. The barriers in this study included funding for technological equipment and professional development for teachers to use media in the classrooms. Several principals in this study – nearly half of the 17 who responded to this survey item (5 of the 23 principals did not respond to this item) – furthermore suggested that literacy should be redefined to better reflect 21st century skills, including new technology and media. In addition, the Ohio middle school principals in this study were neutral about whether the OACS effectively promote media literacy skills. The promotion of media literacy in the Academic Content Standards [OACS] is important because with standards-based reforms, teachers and principals must align lesson plans to the academic content standards. The principals in this study indicated that they believe the OACS promote student use of information, which is one part of media literacy. However, they were neutral about whether the OACS effectively promote other important tenets of media literacy including media creation, student ability to understand information’s ideology, and student ability to critique and empower their communities. The principals in this study disagreed that the OACS allow teachers to evaluate
student learning by projects and portfolios instead of pencil-and-paper tests, which is a critical aspect of effective media literacy instruction.

In addition, this study found that a relationship exists between principals’ perceptions of literacy and their school’s performance. Mainly, it was the principals of higher-performing schools who more frequently believed that literacy instruction would improve with media literacy, and that literacy should be redefined to include more media and technology. The principals of lower-performing schools in most cases expressed the same opinions as the principals of higher-performing schools, but to a lesser extent. For example, 30% of principals from lower-performing schools believed we should redefine literacy, compared to the 62% of principals from higher-performing schools who thought we should. The principals from lower-performing schools expressed concerns about other school issues, such as funding. Three of the 6 principals (50%) from lower-performing schools addressed other issues affecting students in their open-ended responses about redefining. These three principals offered the following suggestions for promoting student literacy and academic achievement: increasing state funding of literacy programs; providing better classroom resources and professional development for teachers; and increasing the number of school counselors. These responses pose the question of whether principals from lower-performing schools must devote their attention to other issues, such as the school’s scores on the state test and school funding as well as student well-being, at the cost of innovation and academic achievement. This would provide an interesting topic for future research.

Recommendations

The Ohio middle school principals (n=23) in this study believed media literacy would improve student literacy. About half of the principals suggested the need to redefine literacy in
order to provide students with the 21st century skills, such as technological proficiency and the ability to use media and information. The importance of new literacies, such as media literacy in school curricula, has also been stressed by researchers, educators and political leaders. The National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS] has issued a position paper calling for the teaching of media literacy in U.S. public schools (The National Council for the Social Studies, 2009). The National Council for the Teachers of English [NCTE] has given an annual media literacy teacher award since 2006. Ohio Governor Ted Strickland recently signed a bill that requires the Ohio Academic Content Standards to specify “skills that promote information, media, and technological literacy” (Ohio House Bill No. 1, 2009, pp. 4-5).

Thus, the need to improve school literacy practices has been well-supported and documented. Media literacy provides the key elements educators are calling for – technology, media use and creation, and the ability to access, understand, and analyze information. However, the principals in this study attest to what previous researchers have identified as prevalent barriers when it comes to effectively implementing media literacy. Mainly, a lack of funding, a dearth of professional development opportunities and the problem of evaluating student learning in media literacy were the issues for these Ohio middle school principals. Furthermore, these principals were neutral about whether the OACS actually call for skills and knowledge that align with media literacy; therefore they are not likely to focus on it despite their interest in doing so and their belief that it would improve school literacy. With the importance of media literacy to student literacy and school achievement, as well as the call for media literacy by researchers, educators, and political leaders in the last few years, Ohio must focus on ensuring that media literacy is called for in the Academic Content Standards. In addition, state standards should make room for alternative types of evaluation such as projects and portfolios, because the principals in
this study indicated that the OACS currently do not, and alternative evaluations are critical to media literacy. In the words of Kist (2003, p. 11): “Traditional paper/pencil achievement tests, which are taken in isolation and use print-based formats, are not going to assess the achievements needed by students as they move deep into the 21st century.”

In addition, educators must be better prepared to teach technology, media, and information use in schools. The principals in this study felt that the teachers in their schools needed more training to use media and technology in the classroom. While schools generally have computer labs with a trained assistant, they usually teach basic computer skills and access to information on the Internet and not the information analysis and media creation aspects that are so important to a media literacy curriculum. Kellner and Share (2007) found that such training is sorely missing in teacher preparation programs. Appalachian State University in North Carolina, Webster University in Missouri, Temple University in Philadelphia and the University of Southern California are the only three universities that currently offer degrees or certificates in media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007), but whether they promote the pedagogy and instructional strategies needed for educators is questionable. Two activist groups (the New Mexico Media Literacy Project and Project LookSharp in Ithaca, New York) do offer teacher training opportunities in the form of workshops, but travel and workshop fees can be prohibitively expensive. Communications programs at colleges and universities offer critical media coursework, but these are usually inaccessible to teachers in training. “Universities should be at the forefront of this [media literacy] movement. Bridges need to be built between graduate schools of education that are doing progressive work in cultural studies and teacher education programs that are training new teachers” (Kellner and Share, 2007, p. 67).
The OACS, student evaluation, and teacher training are three of the most important areas the Ohio Department of Education should focus on for implementing media literacy. The ODE must also adequately fund such ventures by providing schools with computers, video cameras, still cameras, new media subscriptions, and training to make sure students are being prepared with the 21st century skills.

The findings of this study provide evidence that student literacy and school achievement tie to media literacy, but we must address the barriers. Colleges of education must implement media literacy training into their teacher training programs and provide support to teachers who are trying to bring in media literacy. Further research should hone in on ways to do so. Future research could also look at best practices for implementing media literacy and also identify and discuss model programs in other states or countries. We also need to better understand how to merge traditional and new literacies to promote the most effective literacy achievement for students. Principals should actively seek ways to promote media literacy in their schools and reward teachers who are using media literacy.
REFERENCES


Harriss, B. Communities as necessity in information literacy development: Challenging the standards. *Journal of Academic Librarianship, 34*(3), 248-255.


Luke, Carmen. (2007). As seen on TV or was that my phone? New media literacy.” *Policy Futures in Education, (5)*1, 50-58.


APPENDIX A

Survey

Part 1

Which of the following best describes your position?

Principal □ Media Specialist/Librarian □ Curriculum Director/Specialist □

Number of years in position? ______

Number of years in district? ______

Total number of years in education? ______

What school do you work at? ______________________________

What is your definition of literacy? (Please do not go back and change this answer.)

Part 2

Please circle the answer the best fits your opinion of the following:

1. The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote, by the end of the K-12 program:
   
   Students’ ability to understand, evaluate, analyze, and access information in a variety of forms.

   Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

2. The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote, by the end of the K-12 program:

   Students’ ability to identify, dialogue about, and inquire of the ideology of information they receive (in print, imagery, or musical form).

   Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
3. The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote, by the end of the K-12 program:

_Students’ ability to create media (such as movies, Web sites, writing for publishing) in their own voice._

Strongly agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote, by the end of the K-12 program:

_The empowerment of students to critique and inquire of their communities._

Strongly agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. For teachers, Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote:

_The ability of teachers to evaluate student learning by projects and portfolios._

Strongly agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Part 3

1. The following would improve literacy instruction in your school:

_Better access to technological resources such as computers, digital cameras, and software._

Strongly Disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

2. The following would improve literacy instruction in your school:

_Training for teachers to use various forms of media in the classroom._

Strongly Disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

3. The following would improve literacy instruction in your school:

_More funds allocated for training, educators, technological resources, maintenance, and support._

Strongly Disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree
4. The following would improve literacy instruction in your school:

Revision of Ohio Academic Content Standards to promote media of literacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Do you think there is a need to redefine literacy? If so, how? If not, why not? Please explain.
APPENDIX B

Frequency of Responses

Chart 1: Principals’ Responses to the Statement: “The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote student ability to understand, evaluate, analyze, and access information in a variety of forms.”

Chart 2: Principals’ Responses to the Statement: “The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote student ability to identify, dialogue about, and inquire of the ideology of information.”
**Chart 3:** Principals’ Responses to the Statement: The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote student ability to create media in their own voice.

![Chart 3](chart3.png)

**Chart 4:** Principals’ Responses to the Statement: The Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote student critique and inquiry of their communities.

![Chart 4](chart4.png)
Chart 5: Principals’ Responses to the Statement: For teachers, the Ohio Academic Content Standards effectively promote evaluation of student learning by projects and portfolios.
APPENDIX C

Frequency of Responses

**Chart 1:** Principals’ Responses to the Statement: The following would improve literacy instruction in your school: Better access to technological resources such as computers, digital cameras, and software.

**Chart 2:** Principals’ Responses to the Statement: The following would improve literacy instruction in your school: Training for teachers to use various forms of media in the classroom.
Chart 3: Principals’ Responses to the Statement: The following would improve literacy instruction in your school: More funds allocated for training, educators, technology, maintenance, and support.

Chart 4: Principals’ Responses to the Statement: The following would improve literacy instruction in your school: Revision of Ohio Academic Content Standards to promote media literacy.