



# NEW MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION TRANSFORMS SCHOOLS

A white paper on media and learning for today's students



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# Contents

Abstract .....	2
New Media Literacy Challenges .....	2
Core Philosophy .....	3
Background .....	5
Solution .....	5
Definitions .....	6
Conclusion .....	7
About Media Heads .....	7
Sources .....	9

## Abstract

Technology is changing the way we interact with each other in schools, at home and work. Today's children are growing up in a high-tech world. Educators are charged with the job of teaching literacy and incorporating technology in classrooms.

Yet, students are not able to think critically or properly evaluate interactions in their media-filled environments. The implications for this could mean students lack a full range of literacy skills, will be easily manipulated, will not be able to effectively participate in a democratic society and may not be prepared to compete for work in a technological world. Part of the issue for these unprepared students is that most of their teachers – due to lack of time, expertise or expectations – are unable to facilitate their students' knowledge, skills and dispositions with traditional and new media literacy in schools.

This paper will provide perspective on this underlying problem and delineate the importance of new media literacy in the classroom. The bulk of the discussion will look at the reasons for incorporating new media literacy into the classroom. It will review some best practice examples on how to integrate new media literacy in classrooms and describe what existing courses could look like. Finally, embedding new media literacy into the curriculum will be presented as a possible solution to address students' critical thinking, digital literacy skills and core content learning.

## New Media Literacy Challenges

We live in an ever-changing and highly digital world in which media messaging, production and distribution have the potential to impact every facet of our lives, including relationships, legislation, public policy, politics, health and work. A 2018 survey conducted by the PEW Research Center found that almost half of teens (45%) ages 13 to 17 report being online "almost constantly" and 95% have a smartphone or access to one (Anderson 2018). A key question about this fact is not so much what the teens are doing online but how are they interacting while constantly connected? How are they consuming (reading and understanding) media? And are they creating (writing or recording) as well as consuming?

### Students and Teachers Lack Skills

Having never lived in a non-computerized world, current teenagers are described as being "digital natives." However, according to a recent Stanford University study, these teens lack media evaluation skills and are ill-prepared to be critical thinkers and active participants in the information age. The Stanford study gathered data from nearly 8,000 students across twelve states and found that today's middle school, high school and college age students lack important internet evaluation skills. (Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone & Ortega, 2016). In the study, middle schoolers mistook ads for news, high schoolers trusted specious sources without recognizing important clues that should have sown distrust, and college students did not research behind their internet sources to determine their reliability and accuracy (Wineburg et al., 2016).

Teachers across the United States also don't fare well with media literacy competencies. Despite schools' significant investments in digital devices and technology infrastructures, "Teachers are not making effective use of the engaging instructional practices of digital and media literacy ... One thing is certain: simply buying computers for schools does not necessarily lead to digital and media literacy education" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 27). As a result, educators need some guidance.

## Health, Opportunities, Democracy, and Good Jobs at Stake

Due to their lack of digital literacy skills, our young people will be unable to take advantage of the benefits of safe, ethical and productive participation in society. Blind trust in the internet may result in unsafe interactions with strangers and easy manipulation by companies – putting students at risk for unhealthy, uninformed and unwise decisions.

New Mexico students will miss opportunities in the digital economy if they are not prepared. New Mexico rates last in the US for education, according to a 2018 study across states ("2018 Kids Count," 2018). New Mexico's cultural and geographically diverse students may continue to lack an adequate education to be college, career, civic and life-ready, as was found in the [Yazzie/Martinez 2018 legal case](#). If students don't practice expanded literacy to analyze, evaluate and create communications in multimedia formats, they will fail the Yazzie/Martinez mandate.

The most dangerous societal aspect of having so many young people lacking the skills to think critically about media, is the growing threat to democracy it creates. A previous consultant to the Knight Commission and the Innovation Chief at Arizona State's Journalism and Communications Program believes that without information, digital, media and news literacy, democracy and good jobs are at stake (Newton, 2018). We agree.

To further understand the issue, we will look at media literacy's theoretical framework to answer how it fits in today's learning context.

## Core Philosophy

Students will engage and build skills with media and technology in many subject areas so they can be better prepared for personal and professional contributions to themselves, their community, and society at large.



**1 Students need new skills to be successful in a rapidly changing world where tomorrow's opportunities**

**and challenges are yet to be understood.**

Skills such as literacy, numeracy, information literacy, flexibility, problem solving, complex reasoning, teamwork, critical thinking, communication, persistence and creativity are necessary for thriving in today's world. Young people must be able to adjust and grasp new things quickly in a fast-paced and changing world (Winthrop & McGivney, 2016).

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*The new digital economy requires individuals to be able to filter, analyze, and create meaning from the vast amounts of information available online... Digital literacy also becomes essential and as societies continue to digitize, lacking digital skills will be like not knowing how to read and write*”  
(Winthrop & McGivney, 2016, p 13).

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## 2 Students learn best when they are highly engaged in their work.

Educational research since 1968 connects student engagement-defined as active participation and focused on task-to improved student learning and academic achievement (Dyer 2015).

Students tend to engage with locally relevant issues and with media cultures they care about.



## 3 Subject matter should be integrated within other disciplines to demonstrate how they are relevant.

The U.S. Department of Education's technology plan (2010) notes that 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies, such as critical thinking and multimedia communication, should be interlinked with all academic domains and content areas to help students develop a deeper understanding of these disciplines and to make connections between them

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*Media literacy education can help students and teachers better understand and communicate their understanding of math, science, technology, social studies, English, and 21st-century literacy.*”  
-Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2002).

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## 4 To serve students and society at scale, we must leverage the complex infrastructure that already exists within the public-school system.

Student critical analysis and demonstration of media skills must be integrated into curriculum in order to leverage the system already in place.

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*To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, report on information and ideas ... and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new.*”  
-Common Core State Standards (n.d.).

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## 5 The proper preparation and training of teachers is the most important element in a successful program and a successful student.

The teacher's impact on student achievement is greater than any other factor in a school (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

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“  
Very few teachers in US schools grew up learning through a media literacy lens, and without proper training, time and practice, they

will have a harder time understanding the media literacy framework and transforming teaching and learning.” (Jolls, 2015, p. 70).

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## Background

Prior to the state's 2010 adoption of the Common Core State Standards, New Mexico was at the forefront of media literacy education in the United States. Media literacy competencies were aligned with NM State Standards and Benchmarks in English language arts, social studies and health. However, five years after the adoption of the new standards, the New Mexico Media Literacy Project (MLP), a non-profit organization providing media literacy education since 1993, closed its doors. From 1993 until 2015, MLP was the primary source of trainings for New Mexico teachers on media literacy, as well as health education, financial literacy, and other subject areas aligned to the pre-Common Core state standards and benchmarks. Its demise has left a void in New Mexico educators' professional training and support in media literacy that has yet to be filled.

Currently, media literacy is not explicitly aligned to Common Core learning and technology standards. And where previous media literacy curricula helped students learn to decode commercial advertisements and product messages, the current technological changes impacting society now call for thoughtful new approaches for developing and implementing media literacy education in schools.

## Solution

Schools play a critical role in educating students and teachers on the new skills required for effectively navigating through this age of internet bots, social media, fake news, bogus websites, online impersonators, personalized algorithms, artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet addiction, hackers, sleep deprivation, trolling and cyberbullying.

Integrating new media literacy into schools' existing courses would involve the evaluation of media relating to the subject areas and units being taught and providing students with opportunities to explore and create their own media products.

This approach would increase students' critical thinking and digital literacy skills while supporting and enhancing their core content learning. If every subject in every middle and high school incorporated relevant aspects of media literacy education, understanding the role of media in society would become second-nature for students, similar to one being fluent in another language. According to Dr. Vanessa Greenwood (2014), such discernment requires instruction in both media literacy and technological proficiency. As students create multimedia products for their classes, such as screencasts, info-graphs, videos, and blog entries, they also develop skills on how to research for credible sources, and how to evaluate and consolidate information into a synthesized format for audiences, all while using a variety of digital tools. As a result, deeper learning occurs.

Not every young person is going to become a journalist or professional media maker. But every person does need to know how to sift through vast amounts of information, and to understand how to quickly interact with it in safe, ethical, creative and productive ways.

## Middle School and High School

The pedagogical framing of media literacy in secondary education is to inquire (access and ask questions), read (analyze, evaluate), write (create), and share and reflect. The process is the same for all subject areas, but the media consumed and created (info-graphs, data, video, audio) may vary. And after learning the framework for media literacy, teachers can incorporate media literacy into their core content pedagogy to assist their students in these ways:

- **Language Arts:** To expand their literacy and media fluency opportunities.
- **Science:** To provide them with perspectives for evaluating and creating data sources, such as those on climate change.
- **Math:** To examine digital networks, patterns of how viral media spreads, statistics, data analysis, data literacy and data science.
- **Political Science:** To understand internet bots, propaganda, and nefarious methods for election interference.
- **History:** To make historical comparisons between time periods and cultures.
- **Computer Science:** To explore artificial Intelligence, augmented reality and virtual reality.
- **Economics:** To study the impacts of ludo-capitalism in online gaming, and the effects of the digital economy on the world economic markets.
- **Social Studies:** To consider social systems and the effects of technology and social media on democracy, both in the US and abroad.
- **Health:** To research media's influence on every aspect of human health (nutrition, drug and alcohol abuse, mental and physical health).
- **Library Science:** To develop digital citizenship and information literacy skills, as well as exploring and debating timely ethical topics.
- **Foreign Language:** To learn about national identities and media portrayals of different countries and cultures.

## Definitions

### New Media

New media are forms that are native to computers, computational and rely on computers for redistribution.

### Media Literacy

The National Association of Media Literacy Educators defines media literacy as *the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act with all forms of communication.*

### New Media Literacy

The ability to critically and suitably consume messages in a variety of digital media channels, to be involved in interactive social media, to produce and publicize communicative, public messages bearing collective meaning in social and cultural contexts. It involves deconstructing our world, including the data and messaging that comes to us through mediated forms.

## Conclusion

The points made in this paper hopefully demonstrate the challenges our students and teachers face in becoming media literate in life and school. We also hope it's clear that lacking media literacy knowledge and skills negatively affects students' personal health decisions, college and career opportunities, and their participation in democracy and the new economies.

There is a theoretical framework for media literacy to provide students with the new skills necessary to succeed in a changing world. However, a more comprehensive approach is required that will:

- Integrate new media literacy education in core subjects for a deeper understanding of each content area.
- Ensure active participation and student engagement in examining and creating media for deeper learning.
- Leverage schools' existing structures and best practices to support sustainable new media literacy implementations into all disciplines.
- Provide teachers with the necessary support and coaching on the implementation of the new media literacy framework and pedagogy within their content areas.



## About Media Savvy Citizens

Media Savvy Citizens facilitates understanding, positive participation and meaningful media interaction for New Mexico learners. Our focus areas are in inquiry, exploration, analysis, education, while connecting community. We provide the tools, resources and community for people to teach and learn the media.

Our community members seek to:

- **Acquire skills** in media literacy (including information and digital literacy)
- **Build and share** tools for teaching
- **Participate** with NM peers in communities of practice (working towards the same goal)

- **Implement media literacy** effectively for the benefit of students and themselves
- **Innovate** with media and learning

Media Savvy Citizens team is not new to media education literacy. We are experienced in the field of media education in research, building curriculum, constructing and delivering presentations, workshops, and teacher training; teaching K-12 and college; health and substance abuse; youth media productions; and as artists producing media in print, audio and digital formats.

Since 2017, Media Savvy Citizens, previously named Media Heads, has been working in phases to understand the needs of stakeholders through research, testing, co-designing and supporting the learning community to enhance media fluency skills.

Our research and testing of strategies lead us to build a 21<sup>st</sup> century media literacy community to be able to advance and scale New Mexican contributions. We leverage resources and learning communities to create a localized approach which serves New Mexico's diverse populations.

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