The history and use of media in the classroom is rich and complex. Teachers have always used media to convey facts and information, however the form in which it is used is often for entertainment or as a way to reward, not necessarily for its literary value (NCTE, 2008, “Use of Media,” para. 1). The growing importance of technology in society has increased what media means for the classroom. NCTE in its position statement about media in the 21st century states,

Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies.” These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple dynamic and malleable. (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1)

Media literacy continues to be an important curricular foundation for many classrooms. Given its goal to “access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1), media literacy changes what it means to be literate within the 21st century. Due to the emergence of media literacy, we now understand that simply seeing literacy as a “book culture” is not an adequate way to educate students (Luke, 2000, p. 424). More importantly, media literacy in the classroom creates opportunities for students to examine the sociopolitical context of literacies that impact their everyday lives.

Given the importance of technology in developing literate environments, this chapter seeks to address how media literacy is defined, what media literacy means for teacher education and secondary English language arts classrooms, and its future given the national standardization of the school curriculum and the sociopolitical context often associated with the role of media in schools and society.

What is Media Literacy?

**Media Literacy and Culture** Since its inception, the definition of media literacy continues to transform. Currently, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) defines media literacy as “the capacity to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). Coined in 1964 by John Caulkin, the definition and practice of media literacy continues to evolve and expand as new technology leads to emerging insight about the effects of media on literacy and literacy education (National Association for Media Literacy Education [NAMLE], 2007, “Media Literacy,” para. 1). Caulkin states,

The attainment of (media) literacy involves more than mere warnings about the effects of the mass media and more even than constant exposure to the better offerings of these media. This [media literacy] is an issue demanding more than good will alone; it requires understanding. (Moody, 2007, para. 2)

This initial overview of media literacy was for teachers to think in new ways and understand the function of media in culture (Moody, 2007, para. 9). Culkin’s original idea establishes the foundation of media literacy—culture. Culture according to Bruner (1996), “takes its inspiration from the evolutionary fact that the mind could not exist save for culture” (p. 3) and that “learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources” (p. 4). To understand media literacy one must recognize its apparent and close relationship to culture and cultural studies. According to Giroux (1996),

Cultural studies, with its ambiguous founding moments spread across multiple continents and diverse institutional spheres, has always been critically attentive to the changing conditions influencing the socialization of youth and the
Media literacy offers a look into the changing conditions that influence the media. Since media is a condition of culture, according to Giroux, we must consider how media such as popular film and music are serious sites for social knowledge but more importantly how the two are inextricably linked.

Additionally, Bruner (1996) offers insight into how culture, “provides us with the toolkit to construct not only our worlds, but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers” (p. 10). Clearly, media literacy is about the triangulation of culture, power and identity. Since Bruner sees culture as “a way in which we question about the making and negotiating of meanings [and] about the constructing of self and sense of agency” (p. 12), media literacy is about these same ideological perspectives. According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, one of the core principles of media literacy is that it recognizes that media is a part of culture and it functions as an agent of socialization. In agreement, Bruner would see culture as key to media literacy because “learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources” (p. 4). Media literacy relies on culture to provide students with what Luke (2000) states are “critical analytic tools to understand reader and viewer diversity of reading positions and sociocultural locations and differences that influence affinities to particular kinds of media forms and messages” (p. 425). Additionally, this takes into account Caulkin’s initial idea about media literacy requiring “more than good will alone” but a true understanding of the sociocultural ideas associated with media literacy.

Hall (1999) also presents another overview about how the foundation of media literacy is linked to culture and cultural studies. Media literacy reflects the fluidity of cultural studies. This fluidity is both the intellectual and pragmatic enterprise of media literacy committed to a moral evaluation of modern society and a radical line of political action (Hall, 1999; Sarder & Van Loon, 1998). The same can be said of media literacy with its ever-changing definition due to its roots in culture. Hall asserts that cultural studies are “rooted in a profound tension between ideas of power, global reach, and the history making capacities of capital; the question of class and the complex relationships between power and exploitation” (p. 265). These ideas can be found in the guiding principles of media literacy. One of the principles of media literacy is that it develops “reflective and engaged students that are essential for a democratic society” and that students realize the “socially constructed messages of media” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). Culture and cultural studies foreground media literacy by providing a platform in which to analyze the sociopolitical nature of media. Finally, Hall asserts that cultural studies have multiple discourses and a number of different histories that speak to media literacies overall goal to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1).

Giroux, Bruner, and Hall provide the foundation of media literacy-culture. Each theorist sees culture as a link to defining what media literacy is and forefront the notion that culture encourages students to reflect and understand the critical and analytical tools to understand positions of power and sociocultural relations. These theorists provide insight into the notion that media literacy is a site for social knowledge built on the concept that media is a part of culture and a crucial agent in teaching and learning.

**Core Principles of Media Literacy** The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE, 2007, p. 4) believes there are core principles that articulate a common ground around what media literacy is. NAMLE found six core principles for media literacy:

1. Media literacy education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create
2. Media literacy education expands the concept of literacy (i.e. reading and writing to include all forms of media)
3. Media literacy education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive and repeated practice
4. Media literacy education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society
5. Media literacy education recognizes that media are a part of culture and functions as agents of socialization
6. Media literacy education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

Each principle according to NAMLE offers not only a definition of what media literacy is but also its implications for practice. Additionally, part of the core principles outlined by NAMLE is how people learn to think critically about their world. These principles speak to media literacy, culture and its functions in education. Media literacy according to NAMLE considers ideas such as how media messages are constructed and how these messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values behaviors as well as the democratic progress. They also consider media literacies roots in culture. According to NAMLE media literacy integrates media text that present diverse voices and perspectives. Media literacy is not about teaching students what to think; it is about teaching them how they can arrive at informed choices that are most consistent with their own values. Finally, media literacy expands the concept of literacy. Pirie (1997) argues that we must begin to redefine the definition of literacy to include technology. According to the principles of media literacy, this practice takes into account that literacy can be
defined in different ways. Media literacy encompasses both analysis and expression. It enables students to express their own ideas through multiple forms of media (e.g., traditional print, electronic, digital, user-generated and wireless). All of these can be considered as literacy. The National Council of Teachers of English sees media literacy in the same way.

According to NCTE media literacy education distinctively features the analytical attitude that teachers and learners, working together, adopt toward the media objects they study (NCTE). NCTE sees media literacy as:

1. All media messages are constructed
2. Each medium has different characteristics and strengths and a unique language of construction
3. Media messages are produced for particular purposes
4. All media messages contain embedded values and points of view
5. People use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages
6. Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors and the democratic process.

Each of these foundational ideas outlined by NCTE sees media literacy as a response to the demands of cultural participation in the 21st century. It includes both “receptive and productive dimensions that encompass critical analysis and communication skills” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). More importantly, it “defines the relationship between literacy, mass media, popular culture and digital media” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). Finally, NCTE makes the distinction between the use of media in education and media literacy in education.

According to NCTE, films screened to reward the class are not media literacy education. If the media material used is for essentially the same purposes for which it originally was intended—to instruct or to entertain—this is not media literacy (NCTE, 2008, “Use of Media In Education,” para. 13).

What is media literacy? There have been several ideas that define what media literacy is. It takes into account the cultural, historical and sociopolitical context of media and is comprised of concrete principles about how media literacy should be defined and used within K–12 settings. The next logical consideration is what media literacy looks like in the classroom.

**Media Literacy in the Classroom**

According to NCTE, media literacy education may occur as “a separate program or course but often it is embedded within other subject areas, including literature, history, anthropology, sociology, public health, journalism, communication, and education (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). The content of media literacy can vary to lessons designed to expose the mechanics of how language, images, sound, music, and graphic design operate as a way of transmitting meaning to an exercise designed to reinforce these understandings through hands-on media making (NCTE, 2005, “Declarations Multimodal Literacies,” para. 14).

Media literacy in the K–12 setting is deeply rooted in the notion that students are more inclined to develop literacy skills if they have a cultural frame that is connected to the material presented during instruction (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2000). Given the belief that students are more inclined to develop literacy skills if they have a cultural frame of reference makes media literacy a necessary tool for the classroom. Additionally, the use of media literacy in the classroom provides different perspectives about what constitutes literacy. Consequently, NCTE advocates broadening the concept of literacy in order for students to apply the knowledge of their language conventions and structure to create, critique and discuss print and non-print texts (NCTE, 2005, “Declerations Multimodal Literacies,” para. 10).

Because technology has increased the complexity of what we consider literate environments, the 21st-century classroom demands that students possess a wide range of abilities from reading on-line articles to participating in virtual classrooms. Currently, most classrooms use some form of media literacy. However, according to Pirie (1997) it is also about changing how literacy is seen in the classroom. There are several classrooms that effectively use media literacy not only helping students to become effective users and readers of text but also helping students derive meaning from traditional and canonical text that are often seen by students as distant and obscure from their everyday lives.

**Media Literacy in the Teacher Education Classroom**

Luke (2000) contends that media, cultural, computer and technology studies can no longer be taught independently of one another (p. 424). She asserts that the development and new framework for media literacy begins in teacher education. Since media has a greater presence in the English language arts classroom, Luke believes that teacher education programs must contend with the current movement of class curriculums built around a book culture that is not adequately educating students in a changing environment (p. 424). Therefore, teacher education programs must provide the necessary tools for teachers to effectively incorporate media literacy into their curriculum.

Luke (2000) found that media use in the English language arts classrooms had been “reduced to add-on units to more mainstream literary content, or as a remedial strategy to capture reluctant readers or at-risk students for whom traditional literacy instruction has failed” (p. 426). But more importantly, she argued that there has been a confinement of media literacy to the English language arts classroom thereby reducing media literacy to the teaching of operational skills. In order to address the issue of media literacy in teacher education, Luke believes there are crucial components that must be included in media literacy courses for teachers.
First, there is the issue of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). Luke (2000) believes multiliteracies should be studied in order to understand how people negotiate their lives using a diversity of literacies (p. 424). Luke argues that because of the many social, political, and cultural issues at stake, instruction on the shift from print to cybertextuality is crucial in the education of teachers (p. 427). In her study Luke emphasized the need to move beyond the operational skills of technology and for teachers to understand and reflect on the social and cultural dynamics of teaching in virtual environments. Second, Luke believes that we have to understand issues of technology as it relates to “intercultural communication—that is a heightened metacritical awareness (perhaps even self-censorship) of “others” in our communications…it is the kind of cultural literacy that is crucial for teachers and students” (p. 432). According to Luke this idea is vital because it requires teachers “to ensure that their students understand concepts of the social and cultural other” (p. 433).

Luke believed these components were important in order to de-emphasize book-based curriculum resources as being the sole source of teaching and learning and a way to “remake” courses on media literacy in teacher education (p. 434). Luke asserts that it is about, “using IT as a tool with which to transform (a) the very relationships between student and teacher, among students, and between students and knowledge and (b) the very organization of school knowledge itself” (p. 435).

**Media Literacy in the English Language Arts Classroom**

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2000) noticed that students who could critically analyze the complex and richly metaphorical and symbolic hip-hop music they listened to where failing to exhibit these same analytical skills when relating to canonical text (p. 2). Their hypothesis was that media literacy, or in this case, hip-hop music, could be used as a vehicle for urban youth to develop literacy skills. The premise of their argument included the basic notion of media literacies connection to student’s cultural frame of reference, in this case hip-hop music, to create and construct meaning from canonical texts.

One of the major principles of media literacy is the idea that students are able to understand how media messages can influence their beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors in addition to offering students how media is a socialization tool often used to critique and understand society. According to Duncan Andrade and Morrell (2000), hip-hop music is one of the few modes of media that offers a useful approach when using media in the classroom in to provide cultural and academic relevance to students (p. 24).

Given the intention of media literacy to “access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2000) developed what they coined an “intervention project” that would enable students to critique the messages sent to them through a popular cultural medium (rap music) that permeates their everyday life (p. 24). The unit was “designed for both its cultural and academic relevance by incorporating rap music into a poetry unit” (p. 25). In addition to its social and cultural relevance, one of the main objectives of this unit was to create a space for urban youth to view elements of popular culture through a critical lens and critique message sent to them through popular media (p. 25). More importantly, this unit was about using media for literacy development.

The unit started with an overview of poetry and understanding the historical background of poetry for interpretation. For example, Elizabethan, Puritan Revolution, Romantics, and Post Industrial Revolution poetry were placed along side rap music so that students would be able to use a period and genre of poetry they were familiar with as a lens to examine other literary works and re-evaluate the manner in which they view elements of their popular culture (p. 26). After the initial overview of poetry and its relationship to rap music, the second part of the unit was for students to present a poem and rap song. The students prepared interpretations of a chosen poem and rap song with relation to its historical and literary period. For example students matched Walt Whitman’s “O Me! O Life!” to the rap group Public Enemy’s “Don’t Believe the Hype” and Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 29” to rapper Nas’ “Affirmative Action.”

Morrell and Duncan Andrade’s (2000) unit was consistent with the ideas of media literacy. The unit provided cultural and social relevancy while exposing students to the literary canon. Additionally, this unit practiced the principles of media literacy because it was situated in the experiences of the students and called for a critical engagement of the text, by asking students to relate it to larger social and political issues. Media literacy calls for these basic tenets. More importantly this unit’s use of media enabled students to develop a powerful connection to canonical texts (p. 30).

In addition to the use of rap music in the classroom, other forms of media that are popular within the English language arts classrooms provide spaces for students to see literacy in another form. According to Bell (2001), the study of popular culture offers the possibility of understanding how “politics of pleasure” address students in a way that shapes and sometimes secures the often contradictory relations they have to both schooling and the politics of everyday life (p. 241). In this study, Bell looked at how teachers could bring popular film texts into the classroom. Pre-service teachers evaluated and participated in discussions of films in order to develop their use of critical literacy and media the in their classrooms. Critical literacy practices were used with pre-service teachers in order to further their understanding of the possibilities of popular culture. The teachers not only saw how to turn this theory into practice, but also had the opportunity to become a part of critical literacy instruction by evaluating and critiquing popular movies and films. The teachers were not just instructed on the practice of critical literacy, but were also able to critically engage in the exercise of media literacy. According to Freebody and Luke (1990), text analysis, or in this case media analysis...
is a part of what successful readers of media do. This type of analysis provides a descriptive framework of a reader’s role. They explain:

A successful reader in our society needs to develop and sustain the resources to adopt four related roles: code breaker (“how do I crack this?”), text participant (what does this mean?), text user (what do I do with this here and now?), and the text analyst (what does all this do to me?). (p. 186)

The “literacy” aspect of media literacy considers that there are other factors besides empowerment and emancipation of students, but students are ultimately interacting and creating texts. However, it is the student’s ability to critically analyze texts that provides the literacy aspect of this term. The use of media literacy in the classroom goes beyond the idea of accessing, analyzing and evaluating communicate messages. Media literacy in the classroom is about how this practice can transform students and teachers not just socially and politically, but academically as well.

The Future of Media Literacy

Critical Media Literacy in the Classroom Inclusion of media literacy in teacher education and K–12 classrooms is not the only issue that should be considered when determining media literacy instruction. There is also the issue of “an unprecedented concentration of for-profit media into conglomerates, in alliance with the government and especially with the federal regulating agency—Federal Communications Commission—and other powerful institutions and corporations” (Torres & Mercado, 2006, p. 260). Since media literacy contemplates how media is constructed and the active inquiry and critical thinking of the messages we receive and create, issues of power, privilege and the sociopolitical context of media within the classroom must be considered.

Torres and Mercado (2006) argue that “corporate culture is taking over public education” (p. 270). While media literacy and education is important, there is still the notion that it must be “critical.” Critical should not be viewed as just a pathological response or negative connotation, but a word that invokes a sense of hope and transformation. So, for this chapter, critical articulates the philosophy originally developed by the Frankfurt School. Critical presents the belief of emancipation, counter-hegemonic discourse and social justice. According to Torres and Mercado (2006), one of the dimensions of critical media literacy is “understanding the educators’ responsibility to help students become actively engaged in alternative media use and development” (p. 261). While media literacy is crucial, critical media literacy incorporates “the use and abuse of the power of media to control masses of people especially children, for the profit of those who own those media and their political allies” (p. 262). While there is a push for media in the classroom, there are still issues of hegemony and control. Critical media literacy makes explicit the need for alternative media and

advises teachers to “help students ‘read between the lines’ of the media messages, question the interest behind them, and learn how to look for alternative ways to be informed and/or entertained” (p. 273). While the general principles about media literacy defined by NCTE and NAMLE consider some of these aspects, the purposes of critical media literacy according to Torres and Mercado are:

1. To act as intellectual self-defense.
2. To discover and support the increase in number and in power of independent nonprofit media.
3. To develop alternative media networks among special interest groups using the new advanced media and multimedia technologies.
4. To make information available on the democratic premise of education for all. (p. 278)

Each of these ideas focuses on what Torres and Mercado deem “the use and abuse of mass media power by putting profit (economic and political) first and service to the public last” (p. 279). These ideas must also be considered when examining media literacy in the classroom.

Equity, Access, and Media Literacy

In discussing media literacy, I believe it is important to acknowledge the future of media literacy in the climate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). While media literacy is an important trend that many educators and researchers believe is necessary to create multi-literate students, the reality for many students and schools is that standardize testing and resources leave little room for the incorporation of media in the classroom.

According to Nogueria (2008), NCLB has forced many schools to eliminate subjects like art, music and science because they are not covered on standardized test (p. 179). If basic subjects such as art and science are being eliminated where does that leave media and media instruction? Many schools continue to struggle for basic resources. New textbooks, adequate school resources and test scores are often the priority, not the use of media in the classroom. While there continues to be a push for media literacy there is still a “digital divide.” In a study conducted by Hess and Leal (2001), they found that students in districts with a larger percentage of African American students had less access to classroom computers. Additionally, since urban districts receive most of the their funding for technology initiatives from federal funds test scores attached to federal dollars means that under-achieving schools miss out on the funding necessary to address media and technology needs (p. 766). If media literacy argues that students must be “reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society,” there must be initiatives in place to ensure “equitable and substantial access” to media (p. 766). While the role of technology continues to become a pressing issue, there is still the matter of access. With the cost and complexity of new technologies, how can we ensure that effective and efficient media literacy is provided to all students?
Conclusion

With the growing field of technology, media literacy continues to evolve. NCTE and others have continued to ensure that media literacy includes “both receptive and productive dimensions, encompassing critical analysis and communication skills, particularly in relationship to mass media, popular culture and digital media” (NCTE, 2008, “Media Literacy Education,” para. 1). Subsequently, this evolution has not always considered the cultural and political conventions of society. While the evolution of media literacy continues to grow, it must do so with issues of power, access and privilege in mind. For this chapter media literacy is more than the capacity to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages, media literacy gives students and teachers the opportunity to examine the sociopolitical context of literacies that impact their everyday lives.

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