
MEDIA ALLIANCE

INTRODUCTION

California's state legislature has missed many an opportunity to jump on the media literacy bandwagon, holding up repeated bills to mandate the development of curriculum and dedicated teaching time on media literacy and digital citizenship. As Media Alliance put it in a 2018 advocacy letter: “we have made some progress putting computer equipment in the hands of California's schoolchildren, but less progress guiding what is to be done with them.”

While the 2018 passage of Senate Bill 830 is a mild step in the right direction by instructing the state to put together a resource list and guide to instructional materials, the gubernatorial veto of companion bill Senate Bill 947 renders the adoption and implementation of media literacy education in California schools optional, when in fact it is crucial and the need is both vast and immediate.

Senate Bill #947 stated “It is the intent of the Legislature to provide a process by which pupils, parents, guardians, teachers, teacher librarians, other school employees, school administrators, and community representatives will engage in an ongoing discussion on safe media and technology use, with the goal of establishing digital citizenship and media literacy as part of the state’s basic educational goals and essential academic learning requirements.”

We hope the Legislature will move towards implementing this intent more fully in 2019. It is the intent of this Media Alliance paper, prepared by our Spring/Summer interns, to provide a brief review of media literacy and digital citizenship best practices and share recommendations for implementing a curriculum in California K-12 schools that emphasizes practical and critical skills that can better prepare students professionally, politically, and socially for the increasingly digitized future.

Our goal is to generate resilience in younger generations when navigating the highly mediated, digital, and connected world. In 2018, most of us would say that we practice resilience every day when we encounter our digital universe. The least we can do is help our children learn how to do that so they consume media rather than it consuming them.

Defining Media Literacy & Digital Citizenship

With the rise of social media, young people are more connected than ever before. Developing media literacy and digital citizenship as a component of public education is essential for preparing students to “safely, ethically, responsibly, and effectively use media and technology resources.”

Media literacy is the ability to analyze, decipher, and critically interpret all forms of media messages.

News programming, user-generated social media content, and advertisements are three main areas that require critical thinking to interrogate messages that are designed to inform, entertain, and promote consumption, and that can have alarming effects when misappropriated. The curriculum must intend to develop critical thinking as a component for learning media literacy. The positive impacts of being media literate will impact consumption and production of media by students as they construct an identity within digital citizenship.

Digital Citizenship refers to:

A practice of safe and responsible use of technology,

A practice of constructing self and subjectivity within a digital landscape.

Understanding the norms, forms, constraints, and opportunities of digital social life includes awareness of both social and technical skills:

- 1. Safe and responsible use of technology:** Students must be made aware of and taught how to navigate a range of concerns related to privacy and surveillance on the internet, the spread of misinformation, digital footprints, cyber-bullying, and sexting. The curriculum must emphasize a healthy form of self-expression that fosters conversation, collaboration, and interaction.
- 2. Constructing self and subjectivity in a digital landscape:** Young people are more connected than ever before through social media, marking a shift to a more networked society through digital and virtual mediums. For young people to see themselves as inevitable participants and members of society, they need to be taught the ways media can be utilized to amplify their voice (individually and collectively), so that they may use media as a tool to identify a space of belonging within complex social structures.

Why Is This Important And Why Now?

Media education and learning healthy relationships with media can have positive impacts on young people's identity formation, learning outcomes, and their overall lived human experience; these include more empathy and less fear of others and the ability to make better decisions. In addition, the practical/technical skills gained through training in media technologies will further prepare students for careers in a digital market economy.

Media education is not only a matter of preparing students for careers, but also is about teaching them how to navigate this "image-saturated" age. Media literacy and media education more broadly intends to help young people learn how to "safely, responsibly, and critically consume media," to quote a stated intention of Senate Bill 830.

We are living in a saturated society, with images and visual culture dominating much of our technological, conceptual and ideological interface. Images are the most prevalent vehicle by which news, entertainment, and social networking infiltrate thought. As a result, the bombardment of media images that accompany ideas, stories, and events, is persistent and pervasive. From broadcast news to user-generated

social media content, the making, tailoring, and distribution of images, content, and ideas are part of how we construct our individual and collective identities. Part and parcel to this construction of identity is how we understand ourselves in relation to others. With social media as the central vehicle of “image” performance, young people are trapped by constant comparison of themselves to the “ideal image” or narrative packaged to them.

Most branches of digital social life (interpersonal communication, entertainment, professional development, and political ideologies) are conditioned for individuals through algorithmic disciplining which defines the ways we interact with each other. The future of our public institutions and democracy depend on future generation's willingness to participate in them. The current political moment in the US and elsewhere in the world indicates that our political systems and ideologies take shape and rise to popularity via media platforms with vast reaches . To ensure the integrity of a political infrastructure that has largely been reproduced with each new political age, we must equip young people to navigate the tools that disseminate messages, images, and ideas onto our society.

School vs Extra-Curricular Activities

School is where young people spend majority of their time. It plays a deciding role in socializing and grooming young people to become productive members of society. Mandating media education in school ensures that majority of students (all those enrolled in the public school system) will have exposure to formal training on media and technology. For K-12 education to serve its purpose to teach, socialize, and prepare young people to enter the world, pursue a career, contribute to society, and live their lives, it must adapt its curriculum to include this set of skills. In our mediated world, media education must be equally prioritized with subjects such as reading, math, and science.

School administrators and educators are already faced with overwhelming challenges in schools pertaining to students’ overuse of their phones and the persistent distractions of social media. By reclaiming a space in public education that goes beyond learning practical technology skills, but rather emphasizes purposeful media making and critical thinking, students are given the opportunity to channel an unhealthy attachment or “obsession” into something creative and constructive. This reflects back to a stated intention of

Senate Bill 947: “In our classrooms, pupils must learn how to safely, ethically, responsibly, and effectively use media and technology resources.”

Leaving media education up to parents, or extra-curricular activities, or non-profit organizations does not impose any kind of requirement, and puts a great deal of pressure on individual families, and/or independent and underfunded organizations to provide the resources (time/ tools/ teaching) necessary to teach young people about media and technology.

There are many non-profit organizations that are doing excellent work that ought to be referenced in constructing a curriculum. These include:

[Center for Media Literacy](#)

[National Association for Media Literacy Education](#)

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Media Literacy Project](#)

[Media Smarts](#)

[The Message Movement](#)

[Action For Media Education](#)

[Media Literacy Now](#)

[Cyberwise](#)

[Brave In The Attempt](#)

Partnerships or associate programs with school systems is one way that these organizations get participants and can secure (usually very low) funding from the board of education. These efforts can only account for a select few amount of participants as they are often limited by budget in how many students they can accept.

Doing this in schools also allows for a further advancement of the school system. It allows teachers to become more tech literate and through this can allow for teachers to have a more engaging teaching process for discussion and engaging their students. Furthering teacher's technology knowledge would also allow for future technology centered teacher workshops including and using new technology such as smart boards and in the near future augmented reality and cloud sharing.

Curriculum Overview

The overall learning objectives of media education curriculum pertain to both media as an influence (something that we experience and internalize) as well as a practice (something that we use, participate in, or express). Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship are the conceptual pillars which guide the curriculum to emphasize the “critical” or the “theoretical” component as well as the “technical,” the “doing,” or the “making” of media, respectively.

In elementary school (K-4), media education curriculum ought to familiarize students with the basic use of technologies. This would be modeled/ similar to how “Technology” or “Computer” classes are currently structured. Students need practice and exposure to the regular use of various kinds of media equipment and technology and encouragement to foster these skills through consistent assignments and projects. Students should be able to identify various mediums (internet, film, video games) and be able to make connections to media and technologies they are exposed to in their daily life with how it is being taught at school.

At the intermediate/middle school (5-8), exposure to media technologies as things worth doing for creativity and career opportunities should begin to be implemented alongside the introductory concepts of critical media (critical thinking, media institutions, and how media gives people information about the world and their lives). Technological training ought to become more sophisticated in middle school.

The first two years of high school (9-10) focus on how students become media makers by supporting them in seeing themselves as communicators in society and encouraging them to use media to tell their unique stories and connect to others. Because our lives are highly mediated and it is through media that we come to understand the world, *making media* ought to be emphasized as a practice of self-discovery and claiming a

certain kind of commentary on our society. If it is true that we come to understand ourselves in relationship to the content that we consume, requiring students to produce, create, and innovate subverts the typical sender/receiver model of communication into collaborative participation with those systems and institutions.

Schools should host professional development workshops specifically focused on media and technology at least once a month to foster an interest in these subjects for younger high school students, so that they may be properly informed on what kind of work is involved in these fields. At the end of 10th grade or when in compliance with core requirements to do so, students could select an area of interest or “field” of practical media to construct a capstone project. There should be at least 3 mandated professional techno-media events that students must attend.

In the last two years of high school (11-12) the focus will be on more complex ideas about media as a vehicle for civic engagement purposes ought to be folded into the curriculum in a culminating capstone project. This should be accompanied with required enrollment in any kind of liberal arts/ social justice elective offered at many high schools (Sociology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice, Psychology, Environmental Studies) for students to be exposed to and begin thinking about how media and technology can be used as a storytelling tool about complex social issues. Comprehensive and robust teaching on how media institutions shape legislation and govern social norms can be introduced alongside community activism, and civic engagement.

There are two components of Media Education that ought to be considered when constructing a curriculum. These include the technical material aspects of media and the critical “theoretical” aspects of media.

Technical Elements of Media Education:

(Not required but elective based media centric courses -- journalism, digital business, sociology, media interpretation)

- Visual: video/ camera equipment for film and photography

Falling under visual media would be skills like understanding video skills and camera equipment for filming, film, and photography. These could be taught in courses such as: Intro to Digital Art, Art, Photography, or general tech classes.

- Audio: radio and podcast and music!

Under the discipline of audio based media would be understanding, learning, and using audio centered programs/software and understanding the systems, the functions, and how to use radios, podcasting softwares, and music. These could be taught along with musical programs such as Band / Orchestra and as their own courses and clubs such as AV clubs or Drama.

- Design: graphic design, printmaking, illustration/ digital art

The category of design in technical media education would include learning about the different forms of design and art that can be done through the medium of technology.

- Development: learning various code languages, front/backend

Classes focused on development would also be encouraged/ emplaced as to promote and teach students how to code and to do so in multiple languages (JAVA, Python, C++).

- Writing for the Web: specific kinds of content creation preparation courses

Lastly classes focused on writing on the web would be centered on learning content creation, learning sourcing and research writing , and how to interpret and write for the web . These could lessons could be taught in classes such as journalism.

Theoretical Elements of Media Education

- Classes on media literacy
Teach students the ability to find, analyze, evaluate, and create media. These classes would teach students to analyze media to find messages and media techniques
- Digital Citizenship courses/coursework
Teach students safe and responsible uses of technology as well as using technology mindfully; with proper respect for the world and community of similar technology/media users around them.
- Media institutions (news or journalism/ art/ tech companies that govern and dominate our use of social media platforms)
Teach students the reach of media institutions to show how certain influences can influence the public's interpretation and view on certain topics or ideas.
- Storytelling, community organizing, media activism

What Mistakes Should We Be Avoiding

It is crucial that we not forget that media is pervasive throughout all areas of our lives. Being media literate should enable people to consume technology mindfully, making it a more effective experience. Teaching critical thinking alongside concepts of media literacy and digital citizenship must be regarded as equally important. In an age when freedom of the press is attacked as “fake news,” we must prioritize ways to help students get in tune with their own analytical voice and help them develop a critical disposition. Especially in this political moment where certain individuals use their high tower status to con people into believing their pushed messages, ideals, and ideas., we must take active measures to ensure that all young people are equipped and interested in going beyond any media message’s face value.

In addition, one major stereotype is that computer literacy and computer/tech knowledge is that it is a predominately male field or hobby. It should be learned by everyone. Incorrect preconceptions that computer literacy and skillmanship is about coding and hacking while it is really just knowing functions and operations which are mainly straightforward and easy to understand/comprehend.

Media Alliance is a Northern California democratic communications advocate. MA was founded with the belief that in order to ensure the free and unfettered flow of information and ideas necessary to maintain a truly democratic society, media must be accessible, accountable, decentralized, representative of society's diversity and free from covert or overt government control and corporate dominance. Forty-two years later, we are one of the oldest media change organizations in the United States. Website: www.media-alliance.org

Authors:

Koorosh Darabi Farsi (Intern): Koorosh is a recent graduate of Northgate High School. He graduated in June of 2018 Summa Cum Laude, and will be pursuing higher education at University of California Santa Cruz in the fall. Koorosh was directed to this project through his research on his final senior term paper. Koorosh would like to thank his teacher Kari Reed for her help in introducing him to this topic and this organization.

Kelli Gabinelli (Intern) – Keli attended Townson University and earned a Masters Degree in Media, Culture and Communications from NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. She has researched youth media organizations and media education initiatives and produced content for the online wiki space, < internationallyouthmedia.wikispaces.com >. She describes herself as a Manager of Accounts by day, and a Media scholar and theory enthusiast by night.