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# Passive Education, Passive Users: A Research-Informed Elementary Curriculum for Media Literacy, Surveillance, and Technology Engagement

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PASSIVE EDUCATION, PASSIVE USERS:
A RESEARCH-INFORMED CURRICULUM FOR MEDIA LITERACY, SURVEILLANCE,
AND TECHNOLOGY ENGAGEMENT
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**Passive Education, Passive Users: A Research-Informed Elementary Curriculum for**

**Media Literacy, Surveillance, and Technology Engagement**

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Honors Thesis

**Abstract**

While media scholars have established that media literacy is imperative to strengthen media's positive effects and limit its negative effects, elementary-aged children continue to be underserved in current and relevant media literacy education. To address this disparity, this thesis created an age-appropriate media literacy curriculum for children aged seven to nine, bolstered by a comprehensive review of the current literature, which was then taught to a second-grade class at a San Antonio charter school. Results found that students' current knowledge of contemporary media literacy concepts is minimal, but students made significant improvements through implementation of the proposed curriculum. This project offers a glimpse of the potential advancements that could be made through an updated media literacy education as well as the cognitive capabilities of the examined age group.

*Keywords*: media literacy, education, curriculum design, middle childhood.

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**Introduction**

Today, children spend—on average—over seven hours per day using media outside of school (AAP, 2021). Along with the time spent, the scope of uses and gratifications for media has expanded as well: in addition to entertainment, children and adolescents now rely on media for information, communication, education, content creation, and more (AAP, 2021; Auxier et al., 2020). In addition, children of younger and younger ages are turning to media for these uses. Media consumption poses both positive and negative effects for children. While media can increase aggressive, "risky," and antisocial behavior, perpetuate harmful stereotypes and biases, and desensitization to violence, it also offers opportunities for learning, exposure to other cultures and identities, and increased prosocial behavior (Keener, 2012; de Leeuw & Buijzen, 2016; Prot et al., 2014; Villani, 2001). Moreover, it is apparent that the presence of media in everyday life is here to stay. As such, the need for intentional, active media literacy to guide these age groups through the complexities of media has grown more urgent than ever.

The issue of media literacy is complex and fraught with political obstacles. As the political climate has confronted issues of "fake news" and disinformation, the regulation of media has become a polarized discussion topic with partisan implications. Furthermore, because the education system in the United States is a power delegated to individual states, it is complicated to enact comprehensive national legislation, resulting in uneven policies surrounding media literacy curricula that often reflect a state's political leanings. Additionally, the ever-evolving nature of media itself makes media literacy paradoxically more difficult and more necessary to implement. Because media changes rapidly with new technologies and expanding platforms, enacting relevant and thorough media literacy curricula is an ongoing and

often tedious process. These issues pose a complex challenge that media scholars and educators seek to solve.

<div align="center">**Review of Current Literature**</div>

**Children's Media Literacy**

Over the past 10 years, children's media use and screen time has risen dramatically due to the increased access to technology as well as the COVID-19 pandemic (Rideout & Robb, 2020). In a 2021 survey of parents with children aged 11 or younger, 81% of parents reported their children uses or interacts with a tablet computer—13% more than those surveyed in 2020 (McClain, 2022). Similarly, 71% of respondents reported their children using a smartphone as opposed to 63% in 2020. Specifically, parents reported an increase in their children using all social media sites, primarily with those aged five to 11—yet half of parents do not feel confident about their child's media literacy skills (Clark et al., 2021; McClain, 2022; Rogers, 2021).

To address these advancements, researchers have aimed to educate the public to become more media literate. According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, media literacy encompasses "competencies associated with accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and communicating messages" (Schmidt, 2013). In theory, these skills allow media users to think more critically about the content they consume and to be more aware of the role of media in their lives. To explain why these strategies work, the protectionist approach asserts that media literacy functions "as a way to reduce the risk of unhealthy behaviors promoted by the media" (Stein & Prewett, 2009, p. 133). Moreover, by prioritizing "protection, preparation, and pleasure," media literacy motivates students to critically examine the intention and meanings of media content they interact with and are therefore "more capable of resisting media messages that might negatively impact their health and social development" (Stein & Prewett, 2009, p. 133-134).

Additionally, William Glasser's Control Theory (Glasser, 1986) suggests that media literacy may be effective due to the "relationship between critical thinking and student engagement:"

> What makes knowledge both powerful and exciting is that, if it is knowledge, there is always a point of view. By asking students to examine media as texts, exploring their content, form, origin, ownership, ideology, and influence, media literacy implicitly fosters critical thinking skills (p. 72).

Through these theories and previous media literacy curricula, media literacy has proven to be an effective tool for enhancing students' critical awareness and attitudes toward consuming media content.

In a study conducted by Hans Schmidt (2013), researchers found that higher education facilities are much more likely to "address media literacy competencies in their classes" when compared to educators at primary and secondary schools. Moreover, elementary schools reported including less media literacy and media analysis coursework in their curriculums than other education levels (Schmidt, 2013). Yet, despite the limited media literacy education currently in place, most educators argue that media literacy, specifically media analysis, is a critical skill that should be incorporated into school curriculums. Rosenbaum et al. (2008) outline that schools are responsible for encouraging critical thinking and media literacy because "educators have the privilege of sometimes being the first to introduce children to a new perspective" and are able to offer "new initiatives and ideas which enrich the field of media literacy" (p. 5). At all levels of education, faculty members conveyed that "it is important to teach about media literacy," how to create and access content, how to use media technologies, and how to analyze media such as television, advertisements, and web and music content (Schmidt, 2013).

Furthermore, parents have expressed increased concern regarding their children's media use: in 2020, 71% of parents of children under 12 reported feeling concerned that their child's screen time is too high, and 56% of parents with children aged five to 11 communicated that their child was exposed to inappropriate content on platforms such as YouTube (Auxier et al., 2020). And while respondents felt that it is primarily the parent's responsibility to protect their children from harmful online content, many also outlined the role of the government in fulfilling this need (Auxier et al., 2020). Conversely, while media consumption can also pose many positive effects for families, such as "allowing family members to keep in touch, make plans in real-time, ensure children's safety as they allow communications in emergency situations, strengthen family ties, encourage parent–child interactions, and promote and facilitate discussions," many parents are not able to contribute adequate time or knowledge to strengthen these concepts for their children (Procentese et al., 2019). In response, several states and politicians have taken action to address this. In Illinois, House Bill 0234 mandated that starting in the 2022-2023 school year, public high schools must include a media literacy unit in their curricula as determined by the State Board of Education (IL General Assembly, 2021). Additionally, in Michigan, leaders sponsored the Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy Act (2019), which would allot designated funds from the Department of Education to state and local educational entities "to promote media literacy and digital citizenship." However, passed legislation has been limited and specific to each individual state.

Health professionals have also encouraged incorporating media literacy strategies into families' lifestyles in order to maximize media's positive effects and limit the negative impact. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommends teaching children to critically evaluate advertising and its influence, learn proper privacy and online safety etiquette,

and analyze the media content being consumed—all of which can be accomplished through a comprehensive, age-appropriate media literacy curriculum (AACAP, 2020). Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics provides a "Family Media Plan" to help parents set boundaries for media, discuss media content from a critical lens as a family, and create safe spaces on media platforms (AAP, 2021).

The need for digital literacy becomes more nuanced when accounting for demographic factors and unequal access to resources. Many of these challenges became apparent with the shift to online learning during COVID-19. In a survey of parents of children in K-12 schools, 59% of low-income respondents felt their children would face greater digital obstacles to completing schoolwork than their peers due to the "digital divide" (Vogels, 2020). Additionally, considering that Americans with disabilities report feeling more uncomfortable with technology and 14% of public school students identify as having a disability, there are likely additional obstacles and barriers to media and technology efficacy with the student population, as well (Schaeffer, 2020).

Evidently, there is a significant demand for media literacy and its various powerful and positive effects on students. According to Bulger and Davison (2018), the implementation of media literacy education was associated with increased critical thinking, specifically regarding representation, bias, and media and advertising messaging, as well as greater awareness of media violence, diverse perspectives, and the influence of media in general (Bulger & Davison, 2018; Duran et al., 2008). Multiple other studies also found that media literacy curriculums were correlated with stronger abilities to identify misinformation and stereotypes, decreased acceptance of media aggression, reduced self-reported physical aggression, and mitigation of the third-person effect (Duran et al., 2008; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Krahé & Busching, 2014; Rosenbaum et al., 2008). Media literacy can even apply to formal or informal health

communication messages, with educational programs shown to "[reduce] the attitudes that could lead to eating disorders" and resist messages encouraging smoking (Rosenbaum et al., 2008). Moreover, media scholars argue media such as apps "may be the best medium we have for promoting positive health," thus making digital literacy a critical tool needed in order to reap these benefits (Keener, 2012, p. 40). Furthermore, regarding the increased role of media in politics, media literacy is effective at increasing awareness of how political "allegiances could affect media content" (Rosenbaum et al., 2008). In order to understand these effects, it is also important to consider the factors and strategies that enable them.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

*Protection Motivation Theory*

Developed by Rogers and Prentice-Dunn (1997), Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) proposes that appeals to fear motivate individuals to reduce the threat in order to reset their emotional state back to equilibrium, consequently stimulating a certain desired behavior (Norman et al., 2009, p. 81). Additionally, the perceived effectiveness of the behavioral advice ultimately predicts the action taken by the individual. If the advice "leads to a reduction of fear," the individual is more likely to heed advice (Norman et al., 2009, p. 81). Conversely, if the advice is ineffectual or unclear, the individual is likely to resort to other coping strategies "such as avoidance or denial" instead of changing their behavior (Norman et al., 2009, p. 82). To explain this pattern, Rogers first outlines the importance of threat severity and perceived vulnerability to the threat, as well as "the probability of the event occurrence if no protective behavior is adopted" (Norman et al., 2009, p. 82; Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 2009). Rogers and Prentice-Dunn then posit that the threat is mediated by an individual's response efficacy, or the effectiveness of the respective advice, as well as their self-efficacy, or their ability to carry out

the advice (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1997). These interlocking factors—threat appraisal and

coping appraisal—ultimately constitute the concept of "protection motivation." In order to adopt

protection motivation strategies, one's "perceptions of severity and vulnerability should

outweigh the rewards associated with maladaptive responses," and "perceptions of response

efficacy and self-efficacy should outweigh the response costs of the adaptive behavior" (Norman

et al., 2009, p. 85).

**Figure 1**

*Cognitive mediating processes of Protection Motivation Theory*
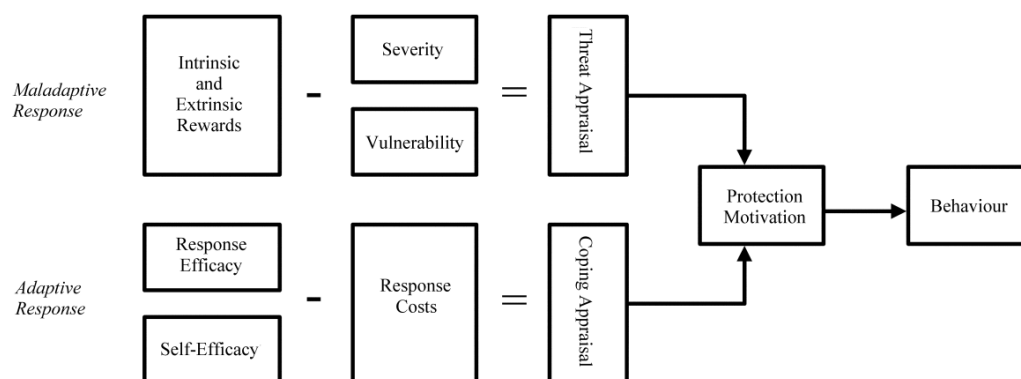


*Note*. By Norman, P., Boer, H., & Seydel, E. R. (2009). *Predicting health behaviour: research

and practice with social cognition models* (M. Conner, Ed.; 2nd ed.). Open Univ. Press.

Put into practice, an individual who is under the influence of alcohol may employ

Protection Motivation Theory when confronted with the decision of whether to drive drunk.

When faced with the associated risks and dangers of drunk driving, they may perceive the risks

to themselves as higher than when they are sober, and the potential threat of a car accident as

more likely and dangerous due to alcohol as an aggravating factor. These circumstances typically

cause greater levels of fear in the individual. Furthermore, because avoiding driving under the

influence is a highly effective strategy to circumvent a car accident and it is typically feasible for

the individual to carry out, they are likely to view this protective technique as efficacious. Further research indicates that characteristics such as past experience, individual personality, and medium of learning can also impact the level and nature of motivation (Norman et al., 2009, p. 82). For example, if the intoxicated individual has had a history of car accidents or has perhaps observed dangerous instances of drunk driving in their life or the media, they may be even more motivated to incorporate protective techniques in order to alleviate the fear they experience.

In the context of media literacy, Protection Motivation Theory effectively explains why media literacy programs may be implemented in the first place. As media content poses a threat through various means such as violence, misinformation, sexual activity, psychological distress, or simply a lack of comprehensive understanding, there emerges a need to find constructive strategies to alleviate children's heightened emotional state. Media literacy programs thus serve as the aforementioned "behavioral advice."

### *Positive Media*

When evaluating the intended purposes and strategies employed by media literacy efforts, it is also critical to consider media's positive effects. According to Keener (2012), positive media—rooted in positive psychology—refers to any media engagement that causes either a positive process or a positive outcome. This concept requires that a "lens of well-being" be applied to media in order to measure its beneficial components and potential to positively impact a person in some way, such as through "positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, accomplishment, and positive health" (Keener, 2012, p. 14). Furthermore, Keener provides the following definition for positive media:

> "Media that measurably promotes, depicts, or facilitates elements of well-being, either by creating a positive outcome or a positive process in the viewer or participant."

Keener argues media is able to produce these varied experiences depending on their respective medium. For instance, she asserts that film frequently demonstrates avenues for envisioning the future, fostering character strengths, and experiencing positive emotions, all of which are key aspects of positive psychology (Keener, 2012). Alternatively, television serves as an outlet for "diversion, social comparison, and to gather current information," as well as setting and reinforcing social constructs, and music contributes to "creating the emotional states of excitement, tranquility, and joy" (Keener, 2012, pp. 23-32). Newer digital mediums, like social media, encourage engagement and human connection, provide public spaces for community and shared interests, and allow for increased avenues for democracy (Keener, 2012). Furthermore, the rise of "apps" has introduced new ways of encouraging and tracking positive health practices, fostering goal achievement through increased engagement and continuous feedback, and reaching other personal, emotional, civic, or community goals (Keener, 2012). These and other forms of media can also develop character strengths, a greater sense of one's meaning or purpose, and practice with prospection (Keener, 2012).

In the context of media consumption, positive emotion refers to evoking a state of awe, empathy, feelings of meaningfulness, interest, humor, self-efficacy, resilience, accomplishment, or willpower (Keener, 2012). Such emotion is often responsible for "increasing creative thought, reducing boundaries between self and other, acting as a 'buffering strength' against future adversity, and generally increasing social, psychological, and intellectual resources" (Keener, 2012, p. 18). Positive processes, alternatively, could consist of partaking in new experiences, while positive outcomes might take the form of reaching one's goals (Keener, 2012).

Considering these effects, media arguably poses many positive circumstances for its consumers. While it is certainly important to note the potential risks and negative effects of

media on children, it is equally critical to acknowledge these many positive effects. When applying these findings to humans' consumption of media, Keener (2012) asks: "How can we use media to be a better version of ourselves?" (p. 46). In response, Keener suggests individuals make conscious decisions about the content they consume, practice mindfulness and emotional intelligence (such as through meditation or keeping a media log), understand the reasons why they engage with media, "savor" their media experiences to enjoy them more fully, and find a healthy and sustainable balance of media consumption ). As children are also active participants in their relationships with media, these findings further support a need to address this question and prepare children for the broad scope of media they may encounter in their everyday lives through holistic media literacy education. Keener argues this can be accomplished through "using media that supports our own well-being (imitation), explaining the choices we are making (teaching), showing kids how to use social media in a positive way (tool use), and creating a dialogue with them about media in their lives (language)" (p. 50). By implementing Keener's positive media perspective into media literacy curricula, such programs can provide a more holistic and less fatalistic education that accounts for the many benefits and uses of media in everyday life.

**Current Media Literacy Programs**

Currently, media literacy programs exist worldwide in varying methods and scopes. In Finland, for example, media literacy curricula are multidisciplinary and include the development of critical thinking skills, interpretation of different media texts, and how to safely utilize technology for communication, reliable information, producing content, and participating in political and civil culture (Valtonen et al., 2019, p. 28). In the United States, states vary from requiring an organized media literacy curriculum to containing no media literacy legislation or

policy at all (McNeill, 2022; *U.S. Media Literacy Policy Update 2020*). However, to date, no information exists that synthesizes the policy status of all states using a fixed, objective scale.

Outside of formal education, organizations such as the *Center for Media Literacy*, *International Federation of Library Associations*, and the *National Association for Media Literacy Education* offer online resources to bolster various age ranges' understanding of media origins and important context for the material (Valtonen et al., 2019, p. 27). Additionally, the past 10 years have seen a significant uptick in extracurricular initiatives designed to teach children how to code, primarily to prepare future generations for careers in computing (Cassidy, 2013; Misra, 2021).

However, according to Valtonen et al. (2019), the contemporary content that should be addressed in schools is "an open question" because "the descriptions of media and media literacy…are often loose." Bulger and Davison (2018) assert that developers of media literacy programs must account for a comprehensive understanding of the media environment and its many contributors, cross-disciplinary collaboration, the current context and needs of media (such as the rise of fake news), centralized national literacy initiatives rather than ideological strategies, and curriculums focused on both active user participation as well as message interpretation. Additionally, while researchers have noted that students should have general knowledge regarding news creation, revenue optimization, machine learning, autonomous interactive agents, behavior/attention engineering, and personalized and adaptive media, they acknowledge that "these themes are typically not included in media literacy education" (Valtonen et al., 2019, p. 30).

In Texas specifically, legislation surrounding media literacy is limited. Media Literacy Now (2023) reports that "schools are required to include instruction [regarding media literacy] in

K-12 classrooms," but "there is a limited professional development requirement" for teachers and administrators as of 2021. The Code of Education, which will be discussed in further detail below as it pertains to the curriculum design, focuses primarily on the concept of "digital citizenship" and cyberbullying, ultimately providing a narrow scope of the role of media in children's lives (Texas Education Code § 28.002, 1995). Current legislation also includes several hindrances to free speech, specifically surrounding race and representation. The state of Texas's Code of Education explicitly states that "a teacher may not be compelled to discuss a widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs," limiting conversations regarding relevancy (Texas Education Code § 28.0022, 2021). The code also states that students may not be taught that "an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously," thus limiting discussions of accountability and the hierarchies that society is intrinsically built upon (Texas Education Code § 28.0022, 2021). Furthermore, sections v to vii in the Code of Education outline the following parameters regarding what cannot be taught in classrooms:

> (v) an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, bears responsibility, blame, or guilt for actions committed by other members of the same race or sex;
>
> (vi) meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race;
>
> (vii) the advent of slavery in the territory that is now the United States constituted the true founding of the United States.

These legal parameters pose unique challenges to Texas media literacy education while also eliciting a need for a bolstered curriculum.

Furthermore, even if such issues were incorporated, media literacy curricula are primarily aimed at adolescents in middle school and high school (Herdzina & Lauricella, 2020, p. 7). Other initiatives foster media literacy among adults and older generations in order to bolster inadequate media literacy foundations (Rasi et al., 2021). Yet, children in elementary school increasingly encounter and interact with media and technology in their everyday lives through classroom use, libraries, museums, and other educational and recreational spaces (Clark & Perry, 2015; Herdzina & Lauricella, 2020). An influx of interactive games and digital content aimed at this age range has also made media use more accessible and appealing for daily life (Herdzina & Lauricella, 2020). As such, Herdzina and Lauricella (2020) outline that it is "imperative" to implement media literacy education at a younger age "because it lays the foundation for being media literate throughout life" (p. 7). Considering these current conditions, the research suggests that children in the early formal operational stage would benefit most from an updated research-based curriculum.

**Middle Childhood Development**

According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children refine their cognitive abilities in semi-defined stages that increase in complexity. Middle childhood (sometimes called the concrete operational stage) refers to the developmental period between ages six to 12 (Collins, 1984). Known as the "age of reason," this stage is typically characterized by development of logical thinking, concrete understanding, and problem-solving skills during intellectual function (Collins, 1984, p. 4). Moreover, children of this age begin to grasp "the capacity to deal with complex problems about perspectives and to coordinate multiple social categories" (p. 74). Children are also able to comprehend more complex emotions and societal roles, such as those that seemingly conflict yet happen simultaneously, as well as "a clear-cut

conscience" leading their decisions (p. 105-107). This allows them to gain a more thorough understanding of how social relationships work, how societal values are embedded within them, and what morals are considered important. In doing so, children of this age become more able to "[develop] standards and expectations for one's own behavior" according to what is deemed acceptable by others around them (p. 152). Specifically, many children "[develop] strategies for controlling or managing one's behavior" in response to how their actions and impulses are perceived (p. 152). This self-concept—or self-schema—differs from earlier stages of development in that children can incorporate other people's perceptions rather than simply the labels prescribed upon them by others and their own understanding of their abilities (p. 151). In middle childhood, this understanding becomes much more comprehensive. Moreover, considering the cognitive advances in decision-making, social awareness, and logical thinking, this group is an appropriate demographic to study media literacy.

With this age group's development and capability to exercise these skills, as well as their increased engagement with digital media, researchers have stressed the need to teach how to identify misinformation disseminated online, be aware of black box algorithms—"complicated functions" of variables in which "no human can understand how the variables are jointly related to each other to reach a final prediction" (Rudin & Radin, 2019)—and attention engineering, and recognize data tracking (Valtonen et al., 2019). Media scholars argue it is critical for students to understand "the mechanisms that drive today's media" in addition to traditional media message evaluation, and existing research communicates that children in middle childhood are not only able to understand these concepts but are also a vulnerable audience in that they frequently interact with media yet are underserved in their media literacy education (Valtonen et al., 2019, p. 26). This discrepancy conveys that media literacy curriculums for children in the formal

operational stage in Texas must be updated to reflect the contemporary media landscape. As such, this project aims to create and assess the effectiveness of a four-week research-informed media literacy curriculum that is suitable for seven- to nine-year-old children and provides a comprehensive and exploratory understanding of the state of children's media understanding in Texas. To gauge its effectiveness, the following research questions are posed:

**RQ1: Which, if any, media literacy topics do Texas second and third graders currently grasp?**

**RQ2: Which media literacy topics do Texas second and third graders currently struggle to understand?**

**RQ3: How effective is the proposed curriculum at improving this age group's media literacy overall?**

**RQ4: Which media literacy themes does the proposed curriculum most strongly influence?**

## Method

To address these questions, I first conducted research regarding Texas's current media literacy curriculum requirements for second and third grade, which provided a baseline understanding of the state's current media legislation and its gaps. I relied upon the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 2019 Belgrade Recommendations on Draft Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Guidelines to identify key curricular areas and gaps in current Texas curriculum. These guidelines outline 19 broad themes and competencies that should be addressed and measured in media literacy education across the world. As an international document, this scale acted as a

neutral baseline for the standards that all states, including Texas, should aim to meet. These measures can be found in "Appendix A."

**Curriculum Design**

In designing the curriculum, there were several key factors I considered. First, I took into account which concepts were currently being taught to this class. Regarding standards of media literacy, the current Texas Code of Education mandates the following:

> The State Board of Education by rule shall require each school district to incorporate instruction in digital citizenship into the district's curriculum, including information regarding the potential criminal consequences of cyberbullying. In this subsection:
>
> (1) "Cyberbullying" has the meaning assigned by Section 37.0832.
>
> (2) "Digital citizenship" means the standards of appropriate, responsible, and healthy online behavior, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on all forms of digital communication.

As such, the current curriculum focuses primarily on cyberbullying and discusses no other aspects or guidelines of media literacy besides basic computer science coursework. Furthermore, these standards are categorized as "career and technology education" and "technology applications" rather than media literacy (Texas Education Code § 28.002, 1995).

Next, I used UNESCO's Broad MIL Learning Outcomes or Competencies to create topics that would address the outlined competencies while taking into account the uses and gratifications of media for this age demographic. Notably, one section ("Media in Civic Life") was ultimately cut due to time constraints, but served to fulfill several of these competencies.

The curriculum I developed spanned four weeks, with one lesson each week, each dedicated to a specific and distinct issue of media literacy: Media for Empowerment and Well-

Being, Safe Media Practices, Media Advertising, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Media. The structure of the curriculum included in-class instruction, hands-on activities, multimedia examples, and group discussions. The full outline of the curriculum can be found in "Appendix B." I then converted the skills taught in the curriculum to a baseline test (see "Appendix C"), which was administered to the students before and after teaching the curriculum. The test divided the curriculum by each week's topic, allowing each topic to be analyzed independently in addition to holistically. By comparing the students' pre- and post-curriculum scores, the test measured the effectiveness of both the current state curriculum and my own lesson plan in teaching media literacy.

**Participants**

The test and curriculum were administered to a second-grade class at the Advanced Learning Academy (ALA) Euclid Campus in San Antonio Independent School District. ALA is a publicly-funded school with program offerings ranging from Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade and with a charter-school admissions process: all San Antonio residents may apply for admission through a lottery application "regardless of their home school or district," but "the majority of the seats [are] reserved for SAISD residents" (*Overview: What Is ALA?*, 2023). The academy is split into two campuses—ALA Euclid serves Pre-K to 3rd grade students, and ALA Fox Tech serves grades 4 to 12. Demographically, the school is highly diverse, composed of 79.9% Hispanic, 15.6% white, 3.1% African American, 1.5% multiracial, 0.4% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0% American Indian (*Advanced Learning Academy*, 2021). (For a baseline reference, the state of Texas's school averages are 52.9%, 26.5%, 12.7%, 2.7%, 4.7%, 0.2%, and 0.3%, respectively, making ALA more diverse than the typical Texas school.) Additionally, regarding socioeconomic status, 48.7% of students are considered economically disadvantaged

compared to the statewide average of 60.3% (*Advanced Learning Academy*, 2021). Moreover, ALA specializes in Project-Based Learning, "which is an approach to education that emphasizes learning through creating" and functions to apply knowledge to real-world issues (*Overview: What Is ALA?*, 2023). While still publicly funded, these standards are unique to ALA's program; for these reasons, ALA was selected for its compatibility with the style of curriculum created in this thesis.

The second-grade classroom used in the current study was comprised of 21 children ages seven to eight, with approximately 38% females and 62% males.

**Curriculum Adaptation & Implementation**

A primary consideration I needed to account for was the class's diverse reading and writing levels. While some students felt comfortable with written instructions and responses, many of the students in my classroom relied on verbal instruction and oral participation to succeed academically. With this in mind, special attention was given to the accessibility of the course and classroom materials to accommodate as many students as possible. Ultimately, I structured my classes by starting with an oral lesson—supplemented by visual aids—then moved into an application activity during which students could apply what they learned to tangible issues. I also incorporated both group and in-class discussions throughout the lessons to make participation accessible and interactive.

To manage the application activities, many of which were handouts, I used Seesaw to adapt the written portion into a more accessible format. Seesaw is an interactive learning platform that allows classroom materials to be converted into flexible and "inclusive communication tools" (*Seesaw: Elevate Learning in Elementary*, 2023). After creating the handouts, I would then upload the materials to Seesaw. For students with lower Lexile levels, the

teacher would then record herself speaking the instructions and any prompts on the page, and students could respond via voice recording or text. In order to accommodate limited writing skills, Seesaw was also used to record students' answers to test and activity questions, which were later transcribed in order to measure their progress.

In creating the curriculum materials, all handouts were also written using Comic Sans, as this font is reported to be more readable than many other fonts and can be particularly helpful for people with dyslexia due to its "'character disambiguation' and 'variation in letter heights'" (Baer, 2020). Furthermore, among children aged nine to eleven, 12 to 14-point Comic Sans was preferred significantly more than other fonts for its readability, with many expressing a desire for it to be standard practice among educational materials (Bernard et al., 2001).

## Curriculum Effectiveness and Analysis

### Pre-Test Assessment

Because the pre-test yielded qualitative data through open-ended questions, all student answers were coded using the following scale in order to run the necessary analyses: 0=incorrect; 1=partially correct; 2=completely correct. Thus, a student averaging a score between one and two would have demonstrated at least partial understanding of the taught content. The test consisted of 12 questions total, with four questions devoted to Section 1, three questions for Section 2, two questions for Section 3, and three questions for Section 4. After creating an answer key for each question, two researchers achieved intercoder reliability with one another, establishing validity among the analyzed data.

Among the collected data from the student pre-tests, scores ranged from 0.0 to 0.83. In other words, students demonstrated minimal initial understanding (M=0.28; *SD*=0.27) of the tested concepts before the curriculum was instituted in the classroom. When considering the

specific topics within the curriculum, students demonstrated the weakest understanding of Section 4: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Media (M=0.13; *SD*=0.35) and the strongest understanding of Section 2: Safe Media Practices (M=0.42; *SD*=0.43). As such, these responses sufficiently answer RQ1: "Which, if any, media literacy topics do Texas second and third graders currently grasp?" and RQ2: "Which media literacy topics do Texas second and third graders currently struggle to understand?" Additionally, students scored an average of 0.31 (*SD*=0.35) for Section 1: Media for Empowerment and Well-Being and 0.25 (*SD*=0.46) for Section 3: Media Advertising. Furthermore, students scored highest on question 6, which was the only question in which students demonstrated partial understanding ("Provide 3 examples of information that should not be shared with strangers online"; M=1.0; *SD*=0.93). However, this may be explained by parents reporting digital safety and their children interacting with strangers as primary concerns for children's media use (Martin, 2021). Conversely, students scored lowest on questions 2, 7, 8, and 11, which spanned across all four sections (specifically targeting the definition of media literacy, password creation, advertising tactics, and media stereotypes), and all produced a mean and standard deviation of 0.

**Topic 1 Assessment: Media for Empowerment and Well-Being**

Initially, students demonstrated limited knowledge of media as a concept, but after beginning a discussion surrounding how they use media every day, they were quickly able to apply it to their own lives. The formal definition of media literacy—"the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication" (National Association of Media Literacy Education, 2023)—contained several difficult vocabulary words that were at first beyond their Lexile level, but after parsing the definition together and defining confusing words, the students were able to understand and apply the concept. To relate this to a real example of

media, we watched the theme song for the Disney Jr. show "Doc McStuffins," which many were already familiar with. After watching, the class applied the five provided guiding questions (Who created this message and what is the purpose? What techniques does it use to attract and hold attention? What lifestyles, values, and points of view does it depict? How might different people view this message? What is left out?) to the video in order to practice critically analyzing media. By applying such questions to a tangible and developmentally-appropriate example, students were able to better understand the higher-order concept.

After the application activity, we discussed how to balance media in our lives. As a baseline example, we watched a clip from "Arthur" depicting D.W.'s frustration with Arthur and his friends while they are consumed and distracted by various forms of media. This video provided a starting point for our conversation: by asking students to think about how D.W. felt and possible solutions for the siblings, they were able to conceptualize similar conflicts when asked about when and why it is important to put down technology in their own lives.

Following the first lesson, students were given a media log, which they were instructed to take home and fill out with their parent(s) over the course of the weekend. This assignment can be found under "Appendix D." Notably, out of 21 students, 6 students returned the assignment. While not an ideal sample size, this result is likely representative of real classroom conditions. Each worksheet varied in the quantity of responses, with some students filling out the log themselves and others relying on their parents to write the responses. The content of the worksheet was also widely diverse between students. Students reported consuming music, movies and television, video games, podcasts, tablets, phones, board games, books, and YouTube over the course of the weekend. Additionally, the time spent on each interaction with media ranged between five minutes to six hours, indicating that some students had stricter at-

home restrictions on media and technology use than others. When reporting their feelings surrounding media use, most students generally used words such as "calm," "happy," "relaxed," and "nice" to convey their emotional state. Less commonly used were words such as "mad," "excited," "sad," "scared," and "astonished." Students also seemed to use media regularly throughout the day, with no notable bias toward time of day. Yet, a common theme found in the submitted assignments is that students are clearly interacting with many kinds of media, and media is an active part of their lives.

**Topic 2 Assessment: Safe Media Practices**

During the second lesson, the class discussed which information is safe and unsafe to share with others online. Students demonstrated fairly strong knowledge in this topic, and I made sure to describe reasons why certain information should be kept private, such as in order to protect their safety and personal data. We also outlined the concept of a digital footprint, which was less familiar to the class. Desk clusters were then given bags with cards of different examples of personal information, which they were asked to sort into "okay" versus "not okay" information to share online. Students were able to work as teams to determine the category of each card, and all but one table correctly sorted the cards on the first try. We then discussed the importance of passwords in the digital age, with most students' familiarity with the concept being limited to their parents setting up passwords for them and simple 4-digit passwords for devices such as tablets, so I provided information regarding what makes a password "strong" with examples.

Students were given a worksheet titled "Password Practice," in which they were shown password guidelines for real companies and instructed to create an appropriate password based on the respective prompts. This assignment can be found under "Appendix E." Because this was

an in-class assignment, all students turned in the worksheet at the end of class. While the students worked, the teacher and I monitored their progress and assisted them with reading the instructions or explaining words and concepts as needed. The students were generally able to follow instructions and create appropriate passwords, and while I collected the handouts after they finished, many students decided to write down their created passwords to use in the future.

**Topic 3 Assessment: Media Advertising**

The third lesson focused on strategies used by advertisers to sell children's products. These tactics consist of peer popularity, repetition, character (or celebrity) endorsements, product demonstration, humor, and premiums (Rozendaal et al., 2011). To cement the students' understanding of these strategies, I showed example advertisements and asked students to name which strategies were being used so they could see the tactics in context. The first advertisement was for the L.O.L. Surprise O.M.G. 4-in-1 Glamper Fashion Camper, which demonstrated premiums and product demonstration. The second ad promoted the Play-Doh Kitchen Creations Candy Delight Playset, and it used humor, product demonstration, and peer popularity. The final ad highlighted Mattel's WWE Action Figures, which exemplified character endorsement, peer popularity, and product demonstration. When students volunteered answers, I asked them why they believed the suggested tactic was being used to ensure they properly understood the concepts and could defend their answers. During this time, I noticed that students first associated premiums primarily with the phrase "sold separately," as premium offers are often highlighted during the end of the commercials when this stipulation would be included. I used this opportunity to clarify that this phrase did not determine whether or not premiums were featured but was instead a correlating statement often included after premium offers and could be present separate from the premium itself. Furthermore, the majority of students seemed familiar with

either the advertisement or the product of these examples, which hopefully made the content easier for them to grasp.

We then discussed how each strategy is associated with specific intended outcomes: peer popularity is linked to liking and asking for the product, repetition encourages recall, character endorsement and premiums foster requests for the product, product demonstration allows children to learn about the product, and humor leads to liking the product. With this in mind, students were then asked to create their own ad for LEGO using at least one of these tactics and identify which outcome(s) it could lead to. This assignment can be found under "Appendix F." LEGO was chosen due to its wide range of products and audience members, making it accessible and relevant to all of the students. As I walked around the room, students primarily seemed to confuse product demonstration and peer popularity, which is a logical mistake as the two tactics often overlap. Specifically, students had difficulty grasping that the full body of the subject must be present in order for peer popularity to occur, instead often featuring only a child's hand. However, students tended to demonstrate a strong understanding of the other strategies with little confusion.

**Topic 4 Assessment: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Media**

The fourth and final lesson focused on race, ethnicity, body image, and gender in order to highlight diversity, equity, and inclusion (or the lack thereof) within media. I first defined diversity and provided examples of traits students could identify with that would distinguish them from their classmates in order to make the concept more tangible. We then discussed how media often fails to represent differences accurately, if at all, and how this was important because media is influential in shaping the world around them (consistent with the Cultivation Theory of Gerbner et al., 1986). Similarly, as proven by Bandura's Social Learning Theory,

consumers of media (especially children) are more likely to model behavior shown in media, so it is important to be aware of what biases, stereotypes, and representations are present in such content (Bandura, 1980).

We then transitioned to a series of questions for the students to apply to characters in media they consumed: Who gets to be beautiful? Who gets to be a superhero? Who is bad? Who gets to be smart or capable? After allowing the students to volunteer their own answers, I provided photo examples of how these tropes manifest in the majority of children's media content. For example, princesses in media (often synonymous with beauty) have historically been portrayed as thin, white women. In contrast, superheroes are often depicted as muscular, white men. Similarly, white men (or boys, for this age demographic) are the predominant characters who get to be smart or capable. Conversely, when considering characters who are portrayed as morally bad, many are depicted with larger bodies or use racist stereotypes, thus not only misrepresenting different communities but also implicitly or explicitly communicating that these individuals are inherently "bad."

With this in mind, students were then asked to discuss their favorite movie or television character with their neighbor and describe how they are portrayed, what happens to them, and what they do. In other words, do they adhere or defy the stereotypes often perpetuated by media content? This allowed the class to segue into a definition of stereotypes as well as examples from media regarding stereotypes of race, ethnicity, gender, and body image.

Finally, we read the book *Parker Looks Up: An Extraordinary Moment* by Parker Curry and Jessica Curry—as well as the illustrator's note at the end of the book—in order to help communicate why representation in media matters and has powerful effects for individuals. The book follows young Parker Curry through a visit to the art museum, where she is moved by a

portrait of Michelle Obama and is inspired by the "endless possibilities" she could pursue just like the former First Lady (Curry & Curry, 2019). The illustrator's note cements these ideas by explicitly articulating that "without representation at all, there will be stories that are missing" because "culture determines who counts in society and reflects the society itself" (Curry & Curry, 2019).

### Results: Post-Test Assessment & Change

To analyze the change in students' media literacy after they experienced the curriculum, the researchers ran a paired sample T-test in addition to an independent sample T-test in order to determine if there was statistical significance in media literacy scores between the pre-test and post-test. The independent sample T-test was used to account for students missing on either the day of the pre-test or post-test.

Results from the paired sample T-test show that had little understanding of the course content when taking the pre-test (M=0.38; SD=0.30). In contrast, these same students improved significantly on the post-test (M=1.53; SD=0.17). Moreover, this test produced a t-value of -8.34 and a p-value of <0.001, making these results statistically significant. Similarly, the Independent Sample T-Test found that students did not perform strongly when taking the pre-test (M=0.28; SD=0.27) but scored significantly higher on the post-test (M=1.32; SD=0.34). This test found a t-value of -8.23 (equal variances not assumed) and a p-value of <0.001, making its findings statistically significant, as well.

The post-test found that students demonstrated a higher understanding of the course content both overall and across each specific topic. Based on the paired sample T-test and the independent sample T-test results, students improved by 300.03% and 369.57% at the end of the curriculum, respectively, thus answering RQ3: "How effective is the proposed curriculum at

improving this age group's media literacy overall?" Additionally, students scored an average of 1.26 for Section 1, 1.76 for Section 2, 1. 26 for Section 3, and 0.98 for Section 4. Considering the students' pre-test scores, the class thus improved the most on Section 4 despite the post-test scores for this question being the lowest of all questions. As such, RQ4: "Which media literacy themes does the proposed curriculum most strongly influence?" points to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Media as the strongest beneficiary of the curriculum. A full overview of the improvement on individual sections is highlighted in the figure below.

**Figure 2**

*Difference Between Pre-test & Post-Test Scores by Test Section*

| | Paired Sample T-Test | | | Independent Sample T-Test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Section | t-value | p-value | % change | t-value | p-value | % change |
| 1 | -9.02 | < 0.001 | 287.5% | -6.33 | < 0.001 | 304.70% |
| 2 | -5.66 | 0.002 | 250.03% | -6.97 | < 0.001 | 323.90% |
| 3 | -2.14 | 0.05 | 200% | -4.42 | < 0.001 | 405.88% |
| 4 | -4.81 | 0.004 | 600% | -3.94 | < 0.001 | 684.32% |

## Discussion

This research aimed to create a media literacy curriculum that would bolster Texas' second and third grade students' understanding of important and exigent media topics. Considering the collected data, the curriculum was successful in significantly improving media literacy among students in the present study.

**Media for Empowerment and Well-Being**

While the vast majority of students were able to identify examples of media and times when it would be important to step away from technology, many students struggled with recalling the definition of media literacy as well as how to confront negative feelings surrounding it. Although these results were somewhat surprising, there are several possible factors that may have contributed to them. This lesson was taught at the very beginning of the curriculum, and approximately six weeks passed between the initial lesson and the time of recall. As such, issues with these questions may in part be caused by a struggle to retain the information. Regarding the question of media literacy, vocabulary levels may also be at play. Although "media literacy" was discussed and defined in the first lesson (and reviewed in the second), the concept of literacy may have been too advanced for this age group. This class specifically struggled with Lexile ability, so this may also have contributed to a lack of comprehension. Furthermore, while the class discussed and watched a video about negative feelings associated with media, this question asked students to empathize with others and communicate their emotions respectfully, so it may have been more difficult for students who have not reached a certain level of emotional development or maturity.

**Safe Media Practices**

Students generally performed strongly in this category. However, as previously stated, this may be because internet and digital privacy are among the most prevalent forms of media literacy for this age demographic (McNeill, 2023). Students were very comfortable reporting which information they should *not* share with strangers online, but were less familiar with information they *could* share. Students responded to the latter question broadly, but were ultimately able to grasp and distinguish between what was appropriate versus not appropriate.

Additionally, students generally were able to create strong passwords for themselves with varying levels of creativity, and while they were not explicitly tested on password etiquette, students often made comments concerning my plans with their passwords and their security, even expressing hesitation to turn in their passwords at all. Several students also wrote down their passwords before they were picked up for future use.

**Media Advertising**

Most students performed much better in the post-test compared to their pre-test scores and used their own advertisement creation to reflect on the different advertising tactics. Interestingly, this topic included several of the most innovative concepts: children's advertising tactics and their associated outcomes are ideas conceptualized within the past 10 to 15 years (Rozendaal, 2011), and higher-education professionals have only just begun studying and bringing attention to them—much less the age demographic featured in this project. As such, some may argue these concepts are too complex for this age group. However, this may instead underscore a broader truth regarding children's learning: with proper scaffolding and vocabulary adjustments, in addition to relevant examples, students are extremely capable of comprehending advanced concepts and can even understand how to properly apply them. When teaching children about media literacy, concepts should not be shied away from because of this fear and students should not be underestimated in their learning capabilities.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Media**

While students demonstrated the lowest scores for this section in both their pre-tests and post-tests, they also showed the greatest improvement in this category. This further strengthens the argument that students are very capable of learning higher-order concepts with proper instruction. Moreover, while of course these scores would ideally be higher, diversity, equity,

and inclusion are complex topics on their own, and without previous understanding of these concepts, applying them to the context of media may be difficult for learners. The lesson for this topic was also only approximately 40 minutes in order to accommodate time for the post-test, making the content feel rushed. Ideas such as tokenism and additional examples of positive and negative representation thus had to be cut out of the curriculum in order to ensure that time would not run out. For future application, this section would ideally be split into two or three lessons to properly scaffold the information and establish a strong foundation for the concept before applying it to media representation. Still, students were very interested, respectful, and engaged throughout the lesson and demonstrated strong potential for additional growth.

**Implications**

Overall, this curriculum and its results pose important implications for teachers, parents, and media literacy scholarship. While minimal time (four class sessions across four weeks) was a limitation of this curriculum, the significant media literacy improvements made within the time constraints implies that even basic instruction in media literacy can result in significant growth and development in students. As such, this curriculum may be useful for teachers who are restricted in the amount of class time they can dedicate to content not mandated by the state. Currently, many parents and teachers debate the responsibility of the school versus the parent to teach these concepts (Auxier et al., 2020). However, as many parents do not have the time or expertise to properly devote themselves to this content, children may benefit from at least receiving an overview of the content in classrooms.

Some parents may also be able to adapt the materials in this curriculum for at-home use. Often, parents have a unique advantage that teachers do not: they are not restricted by class time or legal barriers to teach their children about media, and many have the opportunity to directly

engage with the media their kids interact with, allowing for further conversation and discussion of the topics outlined in this paper (students were familiar with many of the multimedia examples shown and discussed in class, indicating that similar discussions could occur at home, as well). Students in each lesson gave an abundance of examples from their own lives and examples related to their parents. Parents should not only be aware that their own media habits and attitudes are made clear to their children but also know that their children are eager to learn more and understand the role of media in their lives. One example that came up during the curriculum occurred during the Safe Media Practices lesson. Students were familiar with the concept of passwords, but primarily reported them in the context of their parents creating passwords *for* them. However, the corresponding activity and the scores reported in the associated post-test question imply that students in this age group are fully capable of creating their own passwords, so parents could begin implementing these lessons by teaching their children how to create a strong, secure password and giving them the responsibility to manage their own passwords. In all of the lessons, parents served as the foundation of the knowledge the children already had (or did not have), so parents should take advantage of strengthening this foundation to the best of their ability when the circumstances allow. Finally, media literacy scholarship may benefit from incorporating these topics and findings into their recommended practice for schools and parents.

**Key Takeaways**

A recurring theme throughout this project was the amount of flexibility and constant accommodation needed in order to help children succeed, often before even setting foot in the classroom. While I started this thesis with a relatively clear idea of what I aimed to accomplish, I learned that such goals are not always feasible in a real classroom setting and it is common (and

even expected) for them to be repeatedly adapted in a short period of time according to the needs of the students. Obstacles such as student absences, technology issues, missing assignments, side-tracked conversations, lost class time, and emotional reactions are common and often require adjustment in the moment. However, I feel these experiences were also critical to my project as they reflect the conditions of a full-time classroom, and thus my curriculum may be more realistic than previous plans that simply propose lessons without testing them first.

As previously stated, the results of this study support the idea that children are very eager to learn and are capable of processing complex information if they are only given the opportunity. Considering the massive gains in comprehension shown in these results, the most significant takeaway from this curriculum is that parents, educators, and researchers should take advantage of the remarkable level of social and educational development of children in this age range rather than letting concerns of readiness deter them from teaching students this content.

### Limitations

Notably, this project was constrained by several significant factors. The main restriction was time: while the initial curriculum was envisioned to be six weeks in length with one lesson approximately one hour long each week, it was ultimately reduced to four weeks. In addition, the classroom I was assigned could only provide teaching space on Friday afternoons, and as several district-wide holidays occurred on Fridays over the spring, the curriculum was ultimately shortened to four weeks. Because of these holidays, there was also an unavoidable two-week hiatus between lessons two and three, which may have weakened students' comprehension and memory of the first two lessons.

At the beginning of the spring semester, several faculty members expressed concern regarding obtaining classroom time due to a shift in teachers' focus to STAAR testing, or the

state-administered exam measuring students' learning competencies, which takes place in late spring and often incentivizes more intense education of the tested concepts. Because of this, obtaining class time in the first place was difficult, and ALA was chosen due to its slightly more lenient stance on standardized testing and its focus on project-based learning. However, while ALA is publicly funded, admissions and enrollment are based on lottery applications rather than geographic district. ALA also emphasizes "deep learning, individuality, flexible design, [and] connection," which are tenets not explicitly shared by Texas public schools as a whole ("Overview: What Is ALA?"). As such, ALA may not be the most representative sample of Texas classrooms.

Because of the variety of skill levels in my classroom, which I did not become aware of until after my curriculum was drafted, I also adapted several of my activities. For example, in the original curriculum, I created a handout titled "Ad Effects" in which students were tasked with watching a specified advertisement, identifying the tactic(s) used, then matching it to those tactics' associated outcomes. However, because I would risk overcomplicating this assignment if I adapted it for Seesaw, I instead opted to conduct this exercise as a class and asked students to orally volunteer answers. I originally also had a lesson dedicated to critical thinking and media in civic life, which would ask students to analyze the reliability and credibility of news media, but this lesson was ultimately removed due to both time constraints and concerns from the teacher that students were not developmentally prepared for the content. Instead, the teacher felt refocusing time on safety and password practice would be more relevant and developmentally-appropriate for the class. Likewise, if this curriculum were administered to a different classroom, similar adjustments and accommodations would likely need to be made in order to best serve the needs of the respective class.

While there were 21 students in the class and all students participated in the curriculum, only eight pre-tests and 17 post-tests were collected. This limitation was addressed by running an independent sample T-test in addition to a paired sample T-test to determine if there was meaningful difference between the sample of five students who took both the pre- and post-test and the sample of seven pre-test-only students compared to 17 post-test students.

Finally, specifically when drafting the DEI lesson, there were legal limitations regarding what concepts Texas would or would not allow to be discussed, as discussed in the literature. Considering this, my discussion of racial and sexual identity needed to be more limited in scope than originally planned, and I was not able to discuss many of the institutional factors that have shaped racial and sexual discrimination as it pertains to media. When applying these limitations to my own role in the classroom, the Code stipulates that the school "may not accept private funding for the purpose of developing a curriculum, purchasing or selecting curriculum materials, or providing teacher training or professional development related to a concept" (Texas Education Code § 28.0022, 2021). While this curriculum is already compatible with the legal constraints of the Code, I also received no funding from the school or district to teach the lesson plan, ensuring that the school could not face any legal backlash from the state or community if it was poorly received.

### Further Research & Development

While these findings offer preliminary data regarding the effectiveness of this pilot curriculum, the program could be improved by several revisions and additional classroom tests. As detailed in this study's limitations, the curriculum was only administered once a week for four weeks with a two-week hiatus between lessons two and three. However, because of the complexity and amount of content covered, this curriculum would likely benefit from more

frequent instruction with additional scaffolding in order to develop a stronger and more thorough understanding and limit the risks of retention loss. Because there was a six-week span of time between the pre-test and post-test, the timeframe likely contributed to weaker comprehension of earlier concepts such as media literacy and could potentially be addressed by shortening the curriculum time or increasing the frequency of lessons.

Additional competencies could also be included in further adaptations of this curriculum. An earlier draft of the curriculum included a lesson specifically addressing media in civic life and focused on how to interpret and evaluate information in the media, such as through current events articles. This lesson asked students to think critically about information disseminated through the media and answer a series of questions regarding a children's news media article's relevance, accuracy, bias, and reliability. The lesson also sought to teach students how to determine if news was credible or not and would show the differences and biases between different news sources. The topic was ultimately not included due to a limitation of time; readiness was not a contributor. As previously mentioned, further attention should also be given to diversity, equity, and inclusion in media in order to properly scaffold the information and offer a more holistic and thorough understanding of the content. Other competencies could also be included based on time allowed and perceived readiness.

As this curriculum was administered to a singular class, its effectiveness may also not be a representative sample of all Texas classrooms. Moreover, the classroom in this sample fell on the lower end of the target age range; as such, it may be of interest to administer the curriculum to a third-grade class in order to determine if age is a significant predictor of effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

This project ultimately serves as a baseline assessment of the potential benefits and possibilities for growth an updated media literacy curriculum would offer second and third grade students. Based on the findings from its administration, the curriculum's results suggest that not only are children in this age group not currently learning about media as a source of empowerment and well-being, media safety, media advertising, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in media, they are also fully capable of comprehending and applying these concepts to their own lives. In addition to fulfilling this gap, the outlined curriculum presents lessons, handouts, discussion points, and example content that aims to prompt expansion, further research, and exigent discussion regarding media literacy education.

**Appendix A**

UNESCO's Broad MIL Learning Outcomes or Competencies

|   | Broad MIL Learning Outcomes | Competencies for Media and Information literate person who: |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Recognise and articulate a need for information and media in personal and civic life. | is able to recognise, determine and articulate the nature, type, role and scope of the information, media and technology relevant to personal, social and civic needs and interest; can distinguish between their own needs, and the needs, systems and motives of the information and media service providers. |
| 2 | Understand the role and functions of media and other providers of information and communication technology tools. | is able to understand the necessity and function of media, information and ICT providers in society, including on the Internet, and how technological intermediaries and media can work to aid sustainable development, including of open, transparent and inclusive societies. |
| 3 | Understanding the conditions under which relevant providers can carry out their functions | understands the importance of freedom of information, freedom of expression and press freedom, issues of media/technological platforms ownership, decision-making protocols and technologies, as well as professionalism and ethics for information repositories; is aware that many providers are profit-driven, which may compromise public good and wellness; and can understand the conditions of use and decide, evaluate and act accordingly; can recognize where actors use communications to produce hate speech and/or disinformation. |
| 4 | Locate and assess relevant information relating to personal, educational, political, cultural, religious, and other societal needs. | is able to apply search techniques and locate, as well as assess information and media content effectively, efficiently and knowledge of the provenance, ranking logic, and data that is derived from generating search results. |

| 5 | Critically evaluate information and the content of media and other information providers | can assess, analyse, compare and evaluate information and media, as per the initial criteria for assessment of the information encountered or received; can also critically evaluate the information and media providers for authenticity, authority, credibility and current purpose, weighing up opportunities and potential risks. |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | Be able to protect oneself from risks online in relation to software, content, contacts and interaction. | is aware of digital security practices and can apply this knowledge to protect themselves from online risks (identity theft, phishing, spyware, virus infection, invasion of privacy). is aware of threats to personal safety such grooming, bullying, potentially harmful advice, profiling, age inappropriate content, illegal content, incitement to harm, infringement of human rights, etc. and not to spread or share such content. |
| 7 | Analyze, share, organise, and store information and media content | can analyse information and media content using a variety of methods and tools. If needed, the media and information literate person is also able to organise information and media content according to predefined analytical categories suiting their needs and/or resources |
| 8 | Synthesize or operate on the ideas abstracted from information and media content. | can collate and summarize gathered information and media content. Once gathered, they can abstract from information resources and use ideas, as well as put into action, concepts resulting from the retrieval and organisation of information and media. |
| 9 | Ethically and accountably use information and communicate one's understanding or newly-created knowledge to an audience or readership in an appropriate form and medium. | communicates and uses information, media content and knowledge in an ethical and effective manner. They are also able to select the most appropriate form and method depending on the needs of the audience. |
| 10 | Be able to apply ICT skills in order to use software, to process information and produce content. | has the ability to use ICT in order to seek, evaluate and create media and information content, and they also have the requisite ICT skills to engage in generating and distributing information |

| 11 | Be able to apply ICT skills to create products and services of societal or commercial value thus fostering entrepreneurship. | has the ability and requisite skills to create information and media content and other services for entrepreneurial enterprises, thereby engaging in the knowledge economy. |
|---|---|---|
| 12 | Be able to use ICT with critical capacities. | is able to transcend the basic use of ICTs, in order to understand the development of ICT – i.e. the processes, mechanisms and conditions of ICT development, its ownership, control and path dependencies. |
| 13 | Engage with media and other information providers as active citizens. | understands how to actively engage institutions and individuals in promoting rights-based, open, accessible and multistakeholder development of libraries, archive, museums, media and technology actors. |
| 14 | Manage one's privacy online and offline | understands the need for and value of personal privacy rights online and offline for the full development of one's personality, and for protection of one's rights; has awareness of the commodification and monetization of personal profiles and information; is able to adjust privacy settings/levels; can address the balance of privacy and transparency, freedom of expression and access to information; ethically use the personal information of others and respect the privacy of others. |
| 15 | Manage one's interaction with AI systems and games | understands the benefits of AI and games for learning and development; understands when freedoms may be compromised when interacting with AI and games; engages in promoting the development of AI and games; knows how to advocate for transparency and audits of AI and games; monitors the links between one's privacy and interaction with AI and games. |
| 16 | Engage with media institutions (whether with offline or online presence or both) and other information providers to promote access to information, freedom of | is aware of the value of social participation through engaging with media and information services in terms of access to information, the right to expression, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | expression, intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue, democratic participation, and gender equality, and to advocate against all forms of inequality. | freedom of opinion (without engaging in hate speech), intercultural dialogue, participating in democratic discourse through various means in an ethically aware manner |
| 17 | Applying MIL to other social literacies | understands how to integrate critical thinking competencies in addressing health literacy, financial literacy, science literacy, intercultural literacy and other social literacies. |
| 18 | Applying MIL for problem-solving and collaboration | recognizes life's opportunities and challenges as being information-based; understands how to connect with others physically and through technology and media to combine information and knowledge to develop ideas and solve problems. |
| 19 | Knowing how to respond to hate and radical content online | understands the evolution of the Internet and how online content can mitigate or propagate hate and radicalization; is able to identify discrimination or hate content and know what steps to take when one encounters such content. |

**Appendix B**

**Four-Week Curriculum Outline**

1. **Media for Empowerment and Well-Being**

    a. Icebreaker: What is media? What are some types of media?

    b. Ask students how they use media in their everyday lives. Entertainment? Talking to friends? Education?

        i. Media literacy (NAMLE): the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication (includes digital media, computers, video games, radio, television, mobile media, print, etc.)

            1. Renee Hobbs' 5 Questions:

                a. Who created this message and what is the purpose?

                b. What techniques does it use to attract and hold attention?

                c. What lifestyles, values, and points of view does it depict?

                d. How might different people view this message?

                e. What is left out?

        ii. "HW": Media use log. Hand out worksheet for kids to write down every time they use/interact with media in their day-to-day lives. Watching a show? Seeing an ad on a billboard? Listening to music? Reading a book?

    c. Importance of balance of media

        i. There are times when it is important to disconnect (show Arthur video)

            1. Ask: How do you think DW felt?

            2. Ask: Is there a way both groups can be happy and compromise? (i.e. 10 more minutes of screen time before playing with DW)

   ii. Ask: what are some times it is important to put down technology?

     1. Examples: meals, driving, school, important events, before bed

   iii. Emphasize: Can be unsafe, distracting, disrespectful, disturbance if not understood and used properly

2. **Safe Media Practices**

 a. Ask: What information is okay to share with others? What information should we not share with strangers? (have students raise their hands and volunteer answers)

   i. No: address, phone number, full name, passwords, birthday, school, parental info, financial info, personal photos

   ii. Yes: first names, favorite food, hobbies, interests

   iii. Highlight that giving out this info can put them in danger

   iv. Always ask parent/guardian first

 b. Highlight: info that you share/post online can continue to exist online even if you delete it

   i. Explain: digital footprint

 c. Activity: sort "okay" vs "not okay" things to share

 d. Handout: password practice

3. **Media Advertising**

 a. The 6 advertising tactics

   i. Peer popularity

   ii. Repetition

   iii. Product demonstration

   iv. Humor

       v.    Celebrity endorsement

      vi.    Premiums

b. Show examples of tactics and have students identify which tactics are being used

c. Ask: what do you think the purpose of this ad is trying to do?

       i.    Explain how different strategies have different intended effects

          1. Recall

          2. Request

          3. Learn

          4. Like

          5. Believe

d. Handout: "What is this ad trying to do?"

e. Have students pick one tactic and create their own advertisement

       i.    See handout

## 4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Media

a. Explain what diversity is and why it's important

b. Cultivation Theory (Gerbner) & Social Learning Theory (Bandura)

c. Ask: Who gets to be beautiful? Who gets to be in superhero movies? Who is bad? Who is smart/capable?

d. Discuss gendered expectations

       i.    Have students describe their favorite movie / TV characters. What traits does this character have? What happens to them? What do they do?

e. Explain fatphobia in media; thin ideal / muscular ideal

f. Explain how different races and ethnicities are depicted in media and the pervasiveness of stereotypes

    i. Lack of proportional representation

g. Show clips of different representations

    i. Have students point out what they notice (both positive and negative)

h. Read a book to apply concepts

    i. Parker Looks Up by Jessica Curry and Parker Curry

**Appendix C**

Name _____ Date _____

## Learning Application

Instructions: For each of the questions below, explain what you know about the question to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer, please feel free to write "I don't know!"

**This is not for a grade! Your answers will only be used to assess your current understanding of the course material.**

## Section 1: Media for Empowerment and Well-Being

1. What are some kinds of media?

   a. _____

   _____

   _____

2. What does it mean to be media literate?

   a. _____

   _____

   _____

3. What is an example of a time when it is important to turn off technology?

   a. _____

   _____

   _____

4. Gabby feels sad because her brother is distracted and texting on his phone while they play a board game. What could Gabby tell her brother to explain why his actions are hurtful?

　　a. _____

　　　_____

　　　_____

## Section 2: Safe Media Practices

5. Provide 3 examples of information that is **okay to share** with strangers online.

　　a. _____

　　b. _____

　　c. _____

6. Provide 3 examples of information that **should not be shared** with strangers online.

　　a. _____

　　b. _____

　　c. _____

7. Create a "secure" password.

　　a. _____

## Section 3: Media Advertising

8. What are some things advertisers do to try to get people to buy their products?

a. _____

_____

_____

9. What might advertisers want their customers to think or do after seeing the ad?

a. _____

_____

## Section 4: DEI in Media

10. Why is it important for media to show characters who come from different places or have different perspectives?

a. _____

_____

_____

11. Pick one person below and describe how media stereotypes this character.

a. girl                          c. boy
b. superhero                     d. princess

e. _____

_____

_____

12. Using the person you chose above, how could they be shown differently?

a. _____

_____

**Appendix D**

Name _____  Date _____

# Media Use Log

Instructions: Each time you use / interact with media, write down the time of use, type of media used (for example, music, TV, apps, video games, books, advertisements, etc.), how you felt while using it (for example, happy, relaxed, stressed, etc.), and how long you spent using it.

| Time of day | Type of Media | Feelings | Time Spent |
|---|---|---|---|
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**Appendix E**

Name _____ Date _____

# Password Practice

Instructions: As you use media, you may have to create safe, secure passwords to protect your information and privacy. Some media sites have specific instructions for users' passwords, such as the use of numbers, capital letters, or "special characters" (for example: ! ? @ + # $ % & * ~ =). For each site below, make a password that meets the instructions.

Note: Some sites may overlap with the instructions of another site.

1. **Instagram**: Use a combination of at least six numbers, letters, and punctuation marks.

   _____

2. **Facebook**: Use at least one lower case letter, one upper case letter, one number, and one special character.

   _____

3. **TikTok**: Use a combination of letters, numbers, and special characters that is between 8-20 characters long.

   _____

4. **T-Mobile**: Use between 8-50 characters, at least one letter and one number, and no common patterns or phrases (ex. 12345 or "password").

   _____

5. **Microsoft**: Use at least 12 characters and a combination of uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols. Do not use any word that can be found in a dictionary or the name of a person, pet, or character.
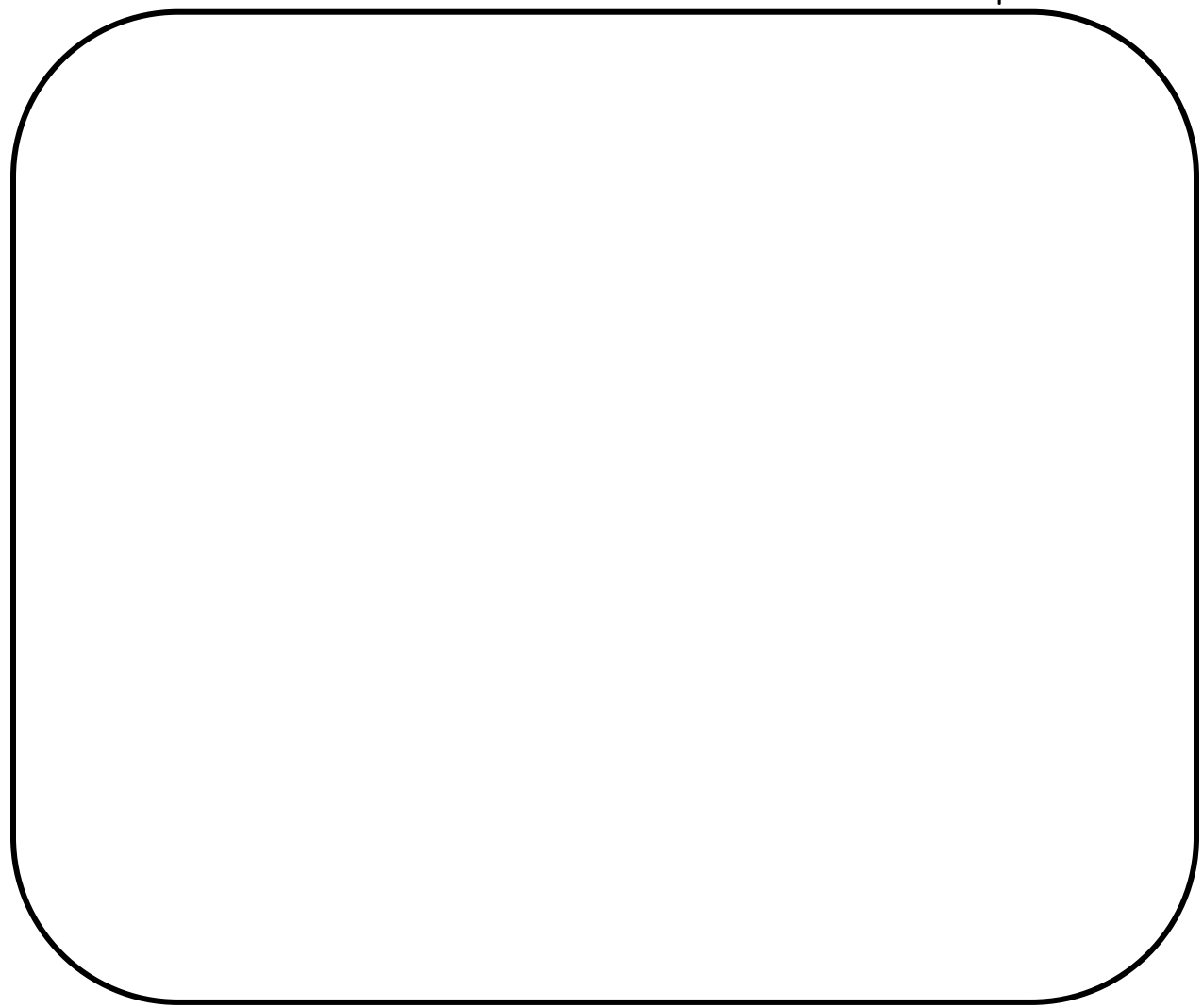
   _____

**Appendix F**

Name _____ Date _____

## Making a LEGO Ad

Instructions: You've just been hired as the newest employee for ALA Advertising! Your first assignment is to create an ad for LEGO using at least 1 of the 6 tactics we learned about today. Use the space below to draw your ad, and please circle which tactic(s) you use.

| Peer Popularity | Celebrity Endorsement | Product Demonstration |
|---|---|---|
| Humor | Premiums | ~~Repetition~~ |

In my advertisement for LEGO, I used _____ to appeal to my audience. This will encourage them to like / recall / request / believe / learn (circle at least one) about the product.

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