

The Effect of Instructional Questioning on
High School Students' Assessment of Media Messages

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by
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Abstract

The Effect of Instructional Questioning on High School Students' Evaluation of Media Messages

The topic of media literacy, the ability to “read” how a media message is constructed and to evaluate the meaning of the message, is an important skill to develop in students of the 21st century. This pilot study seeks to examine if instructional questioning by educators increases students’ critical thinking in viewing a persuasive media message. A brief survey of the history of media literacy is examined to identify the themes of passive vs. active audience engagement with media messages. In addition, the media literacy experiments of Thoman (1998, 1999) and Hobbs and Frost (2003) are discussed to define the “close analysis elements” of media literacy: *technique, purpose, point of view, different people’s points of view, and omitted information*. This pilot study, based on the Hobbs and Frost experiments with high school juniors, created a sampling from three Social Studies classes of Juniors at a private, Catholic school. The three groups received varying levels of instructional questioning after repeated viewing of the opening speech from the movie *Patton*. All three groups wrote a reflective essay explaining if they agreed, disagreed, or were uncertain about the persuasiveness of Patton’s speech. The short answer questions were compared with the essay responses, which were coded based on the elements of close analysis, as identified by Thoman (1998) and Hobbs (2005).

While results from Group 2 are not included in this research paper because of testing irregularity, results from Group 1 and 3 suggest that even superficial instructional

questioning resulted in students identifying more elements of close analysis and engaging in more critical thinking in their evaluation of persuasiveness of Patton's speech. Recommendations are given for future media literacy experiments that will focus on students evaluating the constructedness of media messages and identifying media techniques that shape the message.

Literature Review

I. Introduction: Importance of Media Literacy

Advances in today's technology have made media an even more accessible and dynamic form of communication both in society and in educational settings. How can media be used to not only engage students' attention but also promote critical thinking? This is the central problem of this *media literacy* research, which seeks to examine if instructional questioning by educators increases students' critical evaluation of a persuasive media message. Elizabeth Thoman, Founder and President of the Center for Media Literacy defines *media literacy* as "the ability to create personal meaning from the verbal, (audio), and visual symbols (from various media of television, movies, computers, and advertising, etc.)....At the heart of media literacy is the principle of inquiry" (1999). The Washington report, "Learning for the 21st Century," echoes this importance of developing inquiry skills, skills that include basic information seeking--accessing and managing information and acquiring content knowledge from media—but also skills that challenge individuals to "make complex choices, understanding the interconnections" (2003). Media literate individuals use critical thinking skills to analyze and evaluate the media messages and find ways to communicate their own learning.

II. History of Media Literacy Research

The advent of television influenced the first media literacy research. Though primary sources to this early research were not accessible at the compiling of this paper's research, overview works by Piette and Giroux (1996), Considine (1999) and Hobbs (2005) will be used to lay the background of the early history of media education.

Primary research of 1999-2007 will be discussed later to show the developing trends of media literacy in education.

Early history of media literacy: Passive vs. active audience

The 1970s television literacy research of Fransecky & Ferguson (1973) and Anderson & Ploghoft (1975) supported the first efforts in the United States to examine media education. In 1978 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) asked Sirkka Minkkinen to develop a media education program for international use. The goal of UNESCO's program was to examine the influence of media on the individual, both in positive and negative relationships. Media can be a reflection of social values and a positive enhancement of individuals' understanding, promoting enhanced interactions. Media can also have economic or political reasons to shape an individual's viewpoint, resulting in a negative manipulation (P and G,1996).

This perception of media influence and the role of the audience was a developing concept. McCombs and Shaw (1972) described how media can influence an audience through the selection and depiction of topics. The strong influence of media on a passive audience was supported by research of Singer, Singer, and Zuckerman (1981). The results of "S-R response" suggested that violence on television produced negative effects

(stimuli) and caused children to have aggressive reactions (response). The U.S. Department of Education supplied funding for media education programs such as the Boston University School of Public Communications (1981) and WNET/Thirteen (1980). The Boston University School shared Minkkinen's concerns that media shaped a viewpoint, and that young audiences need to be protected from manipulation. WNET/Thirteen, however, promoted the benefits of media and that the audience has the power of selecting their information. The viewpoint of a more discerning and active audience, rather than passive one, was also supported by McLeod et al., 1991, who characterized a stronger audience that makes decisions about media (P and G, 1996; Hobbs, 2005). Tobin also studied media's portrayal of violence and social conventions in regards to race and gender. Tobin's study disputed the "S-R" response but reinforced the viewpoint that media content can create a "shaped" view of society that manipulates children's viewpoint. Zettl (1998) maintained that active interaction with the media message avoids the risk of manipulation and provides benefits of developing critical thinking (Hobbs, 2005).

Research of 1980s and 1990s: Media used to enhance learning

Along with the concerns for the media/audience relationship, educators began to explore media education for enhancement of learning. Gardner used the education and creativity research of Project Zero to propose that diverse media should be explored by children because it has a positive effect on developing imagination (1982). The Harvard

Education Letter stated “the video screen is helping children develop a new kind of literacy....(essential for thriving) in a technological world....” (Considine,1999).

Considine proposes that students need to be taught how to “read” this language of media to move beyond the *construction* to the content (1999). A constructed message is *shaped* by the creator of the message, certain information is stressed, and other information may be omitted; the media also uses a unique language to present that information, such as through close-ups, music to create mood, etc. (Thoman, 1999; Hobbs, 2005). The Center for Media Literacy was founded in 1989 by Elizabeth Thoman, and the center developed Five Core Concepts: 1) Media messages are constructed; 2) media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules; 3) different people experience the same media message differently; 4) media are primarily businesses driven by a profit motive; and 5) media have embedded values and points of view (Thoman, 1998; Kellner & Shane, 2005). Effectively “reading” media messages requires critical analysis by pondering “what” media language techniques are being used and “how” this shapes the message (Thoman 1999).

III. Hobbs/Frost Media Literacy Experiment

Hobbs and Frost (2003) developed a study to measure media-literacy skills. This study was based on an earlier Australian study by Quin and McMahon in 1993 in which 1,500 ninth grade students viewed a media message and then answered a multiple choice and open-ended question pencil and paper test. Students were asked to identify point of view, target audience, and purpose of the message. Using a similar instrument, Hobbs

and Frost measured the acquisition of media literacy skills by comparing juniors from two different schools: one school had integrated media literacy for a year through the English language arts class and the other school followed a standard English language arts curriculum. The *research hypotheses* were stated as *null hypotheses*:

1) Media- literacy instruction does not increase students' comprehension skills; 2) media-literacy instruction does not increase students' writing skills; and 3) media-literacy does not increase analysis skills, such as "identify purpose and target audience,...techniques used to construct message, ...values and point of view, identification of information omitted from a message, and comparison-contrast between messages" (H and F, 2003).

The *research design* used a comparison sample from another school of similar curriculum and rigor of English language arts instruction. The control school also was demographically similar to the other school (determined through male/female population, similar racial composition, and comparative mix of parent working status). One limitation of this comparison was that students were not selected randomly and a second limitation was that similar instruction could not be verified because of different teachers at each of the schools. The *research measures* used open-ended and short answer checklists. A random sample of the essays was used to develop a "coding protocol" to evaluate writing skills and analysis (critical thinking). *Research results* showed that students in the media literacy education group wrote longer and more analytical essays than the control group. This group also outperformed the control group in identifying elements of how the media was shaped (constructed) and identifying purpose of the message. This research

instrument seemed well-designed, especially with the development of the writing code to evaluate the essays in an unbiased fashion. A certain amount of error remains in this type of appraisal of critical thought expressed in written form, but the code seemed a well-designed tool.

IV. Proposed Media Literacy Experiment

Research hypothesis: Instructional questioning increases critical thinking in evaluation of a persuasive media message.

The goal of this experiment is to make research-based recommendations for instruction that will assist students in evaluating the unique language of media. This research will build on a previous experiment by Hobbs and Frost. One observation made by Hobbs and Frost was that future research is needed to determine the “the role of specific instructional methods as they affect the quality of student learning” (2003). The proposed persuasive media experiment will address this concern by focusing on the specific method of *instructional questioning*. In addition, Hobbs and Frost maintain that media literacy should be integrated in all curricular areas, and this experiment will explore the use of media in a Social Studies classroom.

Similar to their study, this media persuasion experiment will use a sample of junior students. The research hypothesis of this experiment will measure a relationship between instructional questioning and students’ critical evaluation of a persuasive media message. As Hobbs and Frost selected nonfiction media to correlate with curricular design of the grade 11 English class, a film version of a historic persuasive speech was

chosen for this experiment to correlate with Social Studies U.S. History curriculum. Incorporating media literacy in a social studies classroom supports the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) five core standards: 1) developing meaningful knowledge to be used both in school and in society; 2) integrating instruction, including effective use of technology; 3) developing critical thinking and values-based decisions; 4) promoting challenging opportunities for thoughtful inquiry and formation of “well-reasoned arguments;” and 5) engaging student in active learning (NCSS, 2000).

While the Hobbs and Frost experiment was designed to measure improvement in reading comprehension and writing skills in addition to analysis skills, this experiment is designed to focus on measuring *critical thinking skills*. In Piette and Giroux’s evaluation of media education programs, they contend that more emphasis needs to be placed on improving critical thinking and that this can best be done by examining “what is distinctive about each medium...and to understand how the media influence us” (1996). One distinctive aspect of media is its *constructed* message. This experiment will focus students’ attention on the *constructed* media message with each group receiving varying levels of *instructional questioning*.

Instructional questioning techniques are “instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it” (Cotton, 2001). This questioning can be “closed,” just the facts, or “open-ended,” which promotes critical inquiry and personal insights. The development of media literacy is closely linked to the development of critical thinking to evaluate media

messages and to determine whether to accept or reject the message. As Considine points out in his book *Critical Viewing and Critical Thinking Skills*, rather than an attitude of “what you see is what you get,” students should be challenged whether they “get (i.e., understand) what they see” (1999). By equipping young people with media literacy skills, they will be empowered to effectively use media and make informed decisions based on the information they receive. This experiment will seek to add to the knowledge base of media literacy education by testing the integration of media in a curricular area other than English or media communications and by examining the possible connection of instructional questioning with increased critical evaluation of a persuasive media message.

Methods

I. Research Design.

This experiment is a pilot study which samples a small group: three junior Social Studies classes at Pope John Paul II High School in Hendersonville, TN. This high school is a private school with a mixture of Catholic and Christian students. The sample groups contain nineteen students each in Group 1 and 3 and thirteen students in group 2. Though testing information was gathered from Group 2, information from this group will not be used in this research methods report because the experiment testing conditions were flawed: five female students decided to opt out of participating in the experiment as the permission forms were distributed, resulting in a disproportionate sample of ten boys to three girls in the test group.

This pilot study gives initial information on the research design and determines effectiveness of instruments. No random sampling occurs; participant groups reflect intact classes. Though this is a biased sample, Groups 1 and 3 share comparable, homogeneous qualities in several ways:

1. Each group comprises Juniors ranging in ages sixteen to seventeen, indicating similar growth development.
2. All students take CP (college placement) Social Studies, representing academic performance in the average to below average range. (This is a class of students who average grades of C to B or lower, as opposed to B to A grade performances of the Advanced Social Studies students.)
3. The same Social Studies teacher, Dr. Barrow, instructs all groups, ensuring similarity of background in Social Studies instruction.

In addition to a homogeneous sampling, a stratified sampling aids precision.

1. An almost equal sampling of gender present in Group 1 and 3:
Ten boys and nine girls in Group 1 and eleven boys and 8 girls in Group 3
2. Several ethnic groups present in each class:
Group 1 contained thirteen Caucasians, two African Americans, two Hispanic Americans, one Asian, and one South American.
Group 3 had slightly less diversity with fifteen Caucasians, two African Americans, and two Hispanic Americans.

Though this stratified sampling reflects slightly more diversity than the high school's demographics (89.7% Caucasian, 3.5% African American, 1.3% Hispanic American, 1.3% Asian, 1.9% Indian, and 2.2% other), it is reflective of the racial mix of the school. (Ethnic statistics based on a 2006 student population survey conducted by Pope John Paul II geography class.)

II. Research Measures.

This experiment researches whether varying the types of instructional questioning will influence students' assessment of a media message. The independent variable is the type of instructional questioning used and the dependent variable is the amount of critical thinking present in the students' assessment of the media message (the essay on whether they found the speech persuasive).

Closed, superficial questions vs. open-ended, systematic questions

Similar to the Hobbs and Frost (2003) experiment, this experiment used a combination of *closed, superficial questions* and *open-ended, systematic questions*.

Smith and Mackie in their book *Social Psychology* (2000) describe *superficial questions* as those questions that query the "surface" of information presented, such as "cues of visuals, music, or affective behavior such as facial expression or tone of voice...(without evaluating) the quality of information." In this experiment, Group 1 receives closed, superficial questions, such as "describe three things that Patton wears." In addition to these closed questions, Group 2 also receives follow-up questions, such as "what does (what Patton wears) suggest about the person?" Students in Group 1 are asked to describe Patton's voice, while students in Group 2 also write a phrase that Patton emphasizes (focusing on the content of his message). The systematic questioning of Group 2 challenges students to pay closer attention and evaluate the information presented on a more critical level.

Essay Question

Group 3 as the control group receives no instructional questioning along with the viewing of the media message. The three min. film clip of Patton's speech, the opening sequence of the movie *Patton*, is shown three times to all three experiment groups. While Groups 1 and 2 answer short questions about what they viewed in the film prior to answering the essay question, Group 3 answers the essay question after viewing the film a third time. The following open-ended essay was asked:

Did you find Patton's speech persuasive? Yes No Uncertain

Explain.

Prior to students circling their choice of the speech's persuasiveness, the experiment administrator gives verbal instructions that there is not a "right" or "wrong" answer, but instead, students are asked to write honest, thoughtful responses in their essays.

In the Hobbs and Frost (2003) experiment, writing ability was measured as well as critical analysis and a coding system was developed to score essays based on both of these elements. In this experiment, the focus is on student assessment of the media message and the quality of critical thinking. Complete sentence structure or spelling is not coded. The below elements receive a tally mark if present in the students' essays:

Scoring (codebook) for open-ended essay

1. Persuasive Techniques used
2. Purpose of speech
3. Point of view of speaker
4. Differing points of view
5. Omitted information

Hobbs (1998) recommends these five elements as part of the close analysis that should be asked of media messages.

Consistency of the scoring is maintained by first scoring a sample essay and then by having one person score all the essays. (I scored the essays myself.) Each of the above elements only receive a tally mark if a *specific example* is mentioned by the student in support of the statement. For example, “Patton wore elaborate medals to impress his audience of his military experience” receives a tally mark for 1. Persuasive Techniques used, while a statement “Patton was persuasive” receives no tally mark in that same category. This coding suggests the level of in-depth analysis or critical thinking present in the students’ essays. Though some of the instructional questions prior to the essay prompt close analysis of these coded elements, students are not made aware of these coded elements as a “guide” in answering their essay.

Some final notes on the evaluation of the essays

Smith and Mackie (2000) describe that the first step of a persuasive message is getting the audience’s attention, but that “attention does not always guarantee comprehension.” The film segment of Patton’s speech selected for this experiment shows a persuasive and controversial speaker. Director Francis Ford Coppola constructs the sights and sounds to convey the strong persuasive presence of Patton—who Coppola terms a “visible personality”-- while allowing Patton’s extreme statements of patriotism and war to confront the audience and challenge their acceptance/rejection of the message.

The type of superficial questioning given to Group 1 focused on *persuasive heuristics*, that is, would students base their acceptance or rejection of a persuasive message on simple visual and audio cues (Patton's medals, large American flag backdrop, or the bugle sounding reveille)? Group 1 was asked to pay close attention to the sights and sounds and list them, but additional evaluation was not suggested to students. Many of the sights and sounds had positive or negative feelings associated with them, and Group 2 was asked systematic questions such as to describe what the sight of the flag or the sound of the bugle made them feel, as well as how Patton's manner of dress suggested characteristics about him as a person. Group 3 did not receive guided questioning along with the viewing experience and their essay was written in response to the three viewings of the film.

Patton is an example of *expertise heuristic* (Smith and Mackie, 2000), that is, Patton's confident manner and level of military experience suggested by his apparel (such as the four-star general helmet and military medals) leads people to respect and trust the speaker's opinion, instead of specifically evaluating what is said. Would this strong expertise heuristic cause students receiving no instructional questioning (Group 3) or only superficial questioning (Group 1) to accept Patton's message as persuasive and would students guided by additional systematic questioning (Group 2) be less likely to view Patton's message as persuasive?

A final note is that due to a flaw in testing sample of Group 2, the results of Group 2 will not be discussed. This presents a limited comparison of Group 1, which

received superficial instructional questioning, and Group 3, which received no instructional questioning. However, this comparison still allows an opportunity to assess if the presence of even superficial instructional questioning encourages more close analysis and critical evaluation by students of Group 1 in their essays in contrast to students of Group 3.

Concluding thoughts on the pilot study

This pilot study seeks to determine if the instruments are valid in measuring the effects of instructional questioning on high school students' assessment of media messages. The degree of validity is limited in terms of nonrandom sampling. However, the homogeneous, small sampling allows a "snapshot" picture of junior high school students in a Social Studies class setting and their assessment of a media message with varying degrees of instructional questioning. Information from all three groups was gathered, but the limited, flawed test setting of Group 2 will invalidate any accurate comparisons or conclusions. Comparisons instead will involve Group 1 and Group 3 to determine if even the limited instructional questioning provided to Group 1 will have a marked effect on their persuasive essay response in contrast to Group 3, which received no instructional questioning.

Results Section

I. Research Results and Discussion.

Group 1 and superficial questions. The nineteen juniors in Group 1 viewed the opening speech in *Patton* three times and were asked a series of superficial questions focusing on the "surface" qualities of the sights, sounds, and affective associations about

Patton, the speaker. Seventeen of the nineteen juniors mentioned the American flag as the striking image and the majority of the juniors identified the horn/bugle music and sounds of the audience as the two sounds heard. In listing three things that Patton wears, the most frequent response was 1) medals/ribbons, followed by 2) helmet/hat, 3) gun, and then 4) military clothes.

Affective associations. In describing Patton's facial expressions, seven juniors observed a stern and serious expression while an additional four students added anger or hate to the stern/serious description. Five juniors noted a blank/nonchalant/calm but austere demeanor. One student described Patton as bold/heroic/old while another student determined Patton looked young and ready.

As students assessed Patton's voice, an interesting trend was noted between nine students who described Patton's voice as "strong" and perceiving the message as *persuasive* and five students who heard a "loud/raspy/scratchy/assertive" voice and *did not* find Patton's speech *persuasive*. The remaining five students who were *uncertain about the persuasiveness of the speech*, described Patton's voice as "hateful/intimidating" and "angry/rough." The more the emotions behind the message were perceived as rough or angry, the less likely the students were to accept the speech as persuasive.

Comparison of Group 1 and 3 essay. While Group 1 wrote an essay response following a series of questions guiding them to look at surface qualities, Group 3 wrote the essay without receiving any instructional questioning. In response to the question, "Did you find Patton's speech persuasive?" both groups gave the largest response to

“yes,” affirming the persuasiveness of the speech: nine students in Group 1 said “yes” and ten students in Group 3 said “yes.” Eight members of Group 3 said “no” and one was uncertain about the persuasiveness of the speech, while Group 1 was evenly divided between “no” and “uncertain” with five students each.

The essay coding looked at *five elements of close analysis*--indicators of critical analysis--as defined by Thomson and Hobbs in their research: 1) persuasive technique; 2) purpose; 3) point of view; 4) different people’s points of view; and 5) omitted information. Group 1 as a whole had higher rates of mentioning elements of close analysis in their essays: Three students mentioned four elements; six students mentioned three elements; nine students mentioned two elements; and one student mentioned 1 element of close analysis (Table 4). In comparison to nine students in Group 1, only six students in Group 3 noted three or more elements of close analysis in their essays; nine students mentioned two elements; and three students only mentioned one element of close analysis. A final student in Group 3 mentioned no close analysis elements and only mentioned the speech as “boring.” A trend in the results shows that students of Group 1 more often noted persuasive techniques, purpose, and differing viewpoints, while Group 3 more consistently identified the purpose and Patton’s own viewpoint.

Qualitative comparison of the essays. Students in Group 1 frequently identified *persuasion techniques* as it related to *purpose*, such as suggesting that Patton’s harsh tone matched Patton’s wish to ready soldiers for a tough battle—one student wrote, “I guess to

soldiers, his harshness was kindness.” Some students pointed out Patton’s boldness and strong leadership, “Patton is a great man who fought hard.”

However, other students in Group 1 found his speech “opinionated.” One student stated that Patton “is speaking for all Americans, and that may not be everyone’s opinion.” A student who rejected the persuasiveness of the speech defined persuasion as “nice, inspirational, and determined. Patton is very determined, but not inspirational or nice. I didn’t feel persuaded to do anything after I heard his speech. I just felt kind of unhappy.” Patton’s sense of authority and word emphasis impressed a student, as well as the examples Patton gave, but the student concluded, “the speech didn’t persuade me to think we should go to war.”

Students in Group 1 seemed to respond to the *tone* and *content* of the speech. If students perceived the tone as *strong and determined*, students more often *accepted* Patton’s purpose and point of view towards war; for students who perceived Patton’s tone as *harsh* and who noted what Patton *omitted* in his message (that not everyone wants to go to war), the message of the speech *was not accepted*.

Students in Group 3 also responded to Patton’s tone and strong presence in his delivery of the speech. One student described that the speech “got me pumped up and ready to go to battle and show no mercy,” and another student remarked that it “makes men inspired to follow him into battle.” A student who agreed that the speech was persuasive added that Patton “makes Americans feel that they are better than everyone

else,” or another student remarked they felt “proud to be an American” and that they felt “capable.” A student said Patton “was shouting and just being brutally honest.”

One student delineated that for “a speech to be persuasive, you have to keep everyone’s attention, and he had mine.” Another student mentioned that “Patton grabbed my attention” but qualified “I am not sure what exactly it was he was trying to persuade, but it sounded good.” Overall, students in Group 3 who *accepted this message* responded to Patton’s *expertise and imagery/sounds suggestive of patriotism*. Students *did not mention particulars of the content of the speech*, but they approved of his inspirational, patriotic tone.

As in Group 1, students who observed Patton’s message as *harsh*, were *less likely to find his speech persuasive*. One student even noted differing viewpoints, such as feeling that Patton’s viewpoint was too harsh in saying that “dying is not honorable or acceptable.” Another student disagreed with the viewpoint that “all Americans love to fight. Now-a-days that is not true.” An additional student concurred “who is he to say things that ‘Americans believe?’” This student also noted that Patton talked about winning without stating the “reasons and meaning behind (the war).” Two students rejected the speech as “boring” and did not know what he was trying to say and one student was uncertain/confused about the message of the speech, speech because “I liked the speech....but (Patton) didn’t really get across the point he was trying to persuade.” Group 3 students who disagreed with Patton’s speech tended to access the

content of the speech, not just the strong or patriotic tone, but *less* students in Group 3 engaged in this more critical assessment.

Discussion Section

Results as related to the problem statement. The problem statement of this experiment was to measure the “effect of instructional questioning on high school students’ assessment of media messages.” Results suggested that the superficial, surface questioning (independent variable) received by Group 1 did encourage more close analysis (critical thinking variable), as evidenced by the essay question describing if they found Patton’s speech persuasive. Though some students in Group 3 did discuss many elements of close analysis, the students in Group 1 discussed more fully the elements of *technique, purpose, point of view, differing points of view, and omitted information*. Nine students in Group 1 identified three or four elements compared to six students in Group 3 who identified three or more elements. In addition, three students in Group 3 mentioned in their essay that the speech was pointless or “boring” and one student complained that “no one should have to watch this movie three times.” As a whole, Group 1 students engaged in the process of “looking closely” through guided superficial questioning and they interacted more with the images and sounds, linking these elements to the content of the speech. Since questioning of Group 1 students limited their close observation to images, sounds, and facial expressions and the sound of Patton’s voice, their assessment of the message corresponded closely with affective characteristics—students who judged Patton as a strong leader by his facial expressions and voice found Patton’s message

persuasive, while students who judged Patton as harsh or intimidating either rejected the speech or answered “uncertain” in regards to the speech’s persuasiveness. However, the act of looking closely also encouraged students to connect with the content of the speech and occasionally to identify differing points of view or omitted information.

Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations. In the initial hypothesis it was suggested that more systematic instructional questioning would correspond with higher levels of critical thinking, resulting in a higher tendency for students to reject the persuasiveness of Patton’s speech. Since Group 2, which received the systematic questioning, had a flawed sampling and needed to be dropped from this pilot study, this hypothesis was not effectively explored. However, an interesting correlation arose in comparing the superficial questioning of Group 1 with no questioning given to Group 3. Students who were asked superficial questions engaged in higher levels of close analysis (critical thinking) and their acceptance, rejection, or uncertainty about the persuasiveness of the media message was linked to their assessment of the surface characteristics that they evaluated (Patton’s facial expressions and sound of his voice). Close analysis, which was encouraged by even limited instructional questioning, engaged students with the media message and involved some students in assessing other layers of meaning in the message, such as different points of view and omitted information. Group 3, which *did not* receive guidance through instructional questioning, also benefited from close analysis of viewing the brief media clip three times. Overall, Group 1 assessed the media message with more critical thinking than Group 3.

This pilot study was limited by the small number of participants. Though the sampling was homogenous, it was biased in that students used were selected for a matter of convenience for testing at a single school and class location. A consistent sampling was achieved in that students experienced instruction from the same Social Studies teacher and students were juniors; therefore all were approximately the same maturation level. Limiting this selection to the CP (college placement) students provided an exploration of how academically “average to below average” students would perform in interaction with media literacy. Future experiments would involve a larger and more random sampling of two school populations. In addition, it would be helpful to have a group familiar with the “language of media” to compare with a control group that had no earlier exposure to media literacy skills. The Hobbs and Frost experiment did compare a school population that had a year of media literacy skills instruction with a school population that did not receive that instruction, and the results of their experiment suggest gains in critical learning through media literacy instruction. In the debriefing for the Social Studies classes, it was noted that students were not familiar with the “language of media,” such as the term “close-ups,” which was a technique used in the opening scene of Patton’s speech. Familiarizing students with the techniques and practicing how to look for these elements and evaluate how the constructedness affects the reception of the message would be a very important future exploration in an experiment.

For a future experiment, the selection of a Social Studies classroom setting would be repeated for several reasons. One reason is that in a Social Studies classroom, films

and audio clips are often incorporated as a part of the instruction of historical periods and influential people. The need to evaluate media presentations as well as primary sources (such as historic speeches) is crucial because these messages often contain embedded points of view, values, or bias. A second reason for using a Social Studies setting for media literacy evaluation is to provide recommendations to teachers for best practices in using media in the classroom. Finally, targeting “average to below average” students would be repeated in a future experiment evaluating the effects of instructional questioning on the degree of critical analysis. As Cotton’s 2001 research on instructional questioning suggests, “increasing the use of higher cognitive questions...produces superior learning gains...particularly for secondary students.” A goal of future experiments would be to suggest best practices in developing media literacy skills and enhancing critical thinking of “average” students.

Media needs to be introduced by the teacher with effective instructional questioning, opportunities for close analysis, and student discussion so that media does not become a “babysitter,” with the students as a passive audience. Students need practice to develop the skills to “read” media. Just as a person who reads can still miss the meaning of what is read, a person who views media may not interact with the meaning of the message. As Considine’s 1999 research suggested, it is not a case of “what you see is what you get” but rather a case of “do you *get* what you see.” Developing media literacy skills will equip students with critical thinking skills that benefit them in the classroom and in society as they become information literate citizens.

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