Core Principles of Media Literacy Education
in the United States

The purpose of media literacy education is to help individuals of all ages develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens in today's world.

NAMLE

National Association for Media Literacy Education

Introduction

The NAMLE is excited to offer to educators, advocates and allies these Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States. In crafting them, the writers have built upon on previous scholarship in media literacy as well as communications, education, media and film studies, public health and psychology.

We honor those who provided this rich intellectual heritage while also recognizing that much has changed in the decades since the term "media literacy" first came into use. In responding to those changes, this document shifts the focus of the discussion from what we believe to be true about media to what we believe to be true about how people learn to think critically. It expands the boundaries of the field to encompass not only what we teach but also how we teach, thereby distinguishing these as Core Principles of "media literacy education" rather than solely as key concepts of "media literacy."

We believe that these Core Principles articulate a common ground around which media literacy educators and advocates can coalesce. The NAMLE is committed to using the Core Principles as a springboard for vibrant and ongoing dialogue, and as a first step in the development of clear, measurable outcomes and benchmarks for U.S. schools. We invite you to actively join in that conversation at events like the **National Media Education Conference** and online at **www.NAMLE.net**.

This version of the Core Principles primarily addresses classroom teachers in the United States. The "Implications for Practice" section is written with them in mind. Our intention is that future versions of the document will be developed to meet the needs of the wide range of media literacy education practitioners outside the pre-K-12 classroom, including parents, professors, counselors, artists, media professionals, and more.

Throughout this document, "MLE" will be used as an abbreviation for media literacy education.

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This document was developed by the following past and present NAMLE/AMLA Board members: Lynda Bergsma, David Considine, Sherri Hope Culver, Renee Hobbs, Amy Jensen, Faith Rogow, Elana Yonah Rosen, Cyndy Scheibe, Sharon Sellers-Clark, and Elizabeth Thoman

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1. Media Literacy Education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1.1 The process of effective media analysis is based on the following concepts:

    1.1a All media messages are "constructed."

    1.1b Each medium has different characteristics, strengths, and a unique "language" of construction.

    1.1c Media messages are produced for particular purposes.

    1.1d All media messages contain embedded values and points of view.

    1.1e People use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

    1.1f Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process.

1.2 MLE teaches students to ask the specific types of questions that will allow them to gain a deeper or more sophisticated understanding of media messages.

    The accompanying appendix - "Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages" - provides a model of such questions. Because instructional practices must be modified appropriately for learners of different ages and in different settings, the process of critical questioning and the specific wording of questions may vary. Some questions may not apply to every media message, and questions will often have more than one answer. As with all critical questioning processes, the end goal is to enable students to regularly ask the questions themselves.

1.3 MLE emphasizes strong sense critical thinking, i.e., asking questions about all media messages, not just those with which we may disagree.

1.4 MLE trains students to use document-based evidence and well-reasoned arguments to support their conclusions.

1.5 MLE is not about replacing students' perspectives with someone else's (your own, a teacher's, a media critic's, an expert's, etc.). Sharing a critique of media without also sharing the skills that students need to critically analyze media for themselves is not sound MLE practice. This includes presenting media literacy videos, films, books or other curriculum materials as a substitute for teaching critical inquiry skills.

1.6 MLE teachers do not train students to ask IF there is a bias in a particular message (since all media messages are biased), but rather, WHAT the substance, source, and significance of a bias might be.

1.7 For MLE teachers, fostering critical thinking is routine. MLE calls for institutional structures to support their efforts by actively encouraging critical thinking in all classrooms.

1.8 Simply using media in the classroom does not constitute MLE.

2. Media Literacy Education expands the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

2.1 Like print literacy, which requires both reading and writing, MLE encompasses both analysis and expression.

2.2 MLE enables students to express their own ideas through multiple forms of media (e.g., traditional print, electronic, digital, user-generated, and wireless) and helps students make connections between comprehension and inference-making in print, visual, and audio media.

2.3 MLE takes place in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to: schools, after school programs, online, universities & colleges, religious institutions, and the home.

2.4 MLE should be taught across the pre-K-12 curriculum. It can be integrated into nearly any subject area.

2.5 MLE welcomes the use of a broad range of media "texts," including popular media.

2.6 MLE recognizes that evolving media forms, societal changes, and institutional structures require ever new instructional approaches and practices.

2.7 Effective MLE requires classrooms to be equipped with the tools to both analyze and produce media.

2.8 MLE intersects with other literacies, i.e., is distinct from but shares many goals and techniques with print, visual, technology, information, and other literacies.

2.9 As a literacy, MLE may have political consequences, but it is not a political movement; it is an educational discipline.

2.10 While MLE may result in students wanting to change or reform media, MLE itself is not focused on changing media, but rather on changing educational practice and increasing students' knowledge and skills.

3. Media Literacy Education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

3.1 Media literacy is not a "have it or not" competency, but rather an ever evolving continuum of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and actions.

3.2 The requirements of MLE cannot be addressed by a single event, class, day or even week-long intervention. Rather, MLE teachers seek to provide students with numerous and diverse opportunities to practice and develop skills of analysis and expression.

3.3 MLE engages students with varied learning styles.

3.4 MLE is most effective when used with co-learning pedagogies, in which teachers learn from students and students learn from teachers and from classmates.

3.5 MLE builds skills that encourage healthy lifestyles and decision making; it is not about inoculating people against presumed or actual harmful media effects.

3.6 MLE teaches media management in a way that helps students learn to make informed decisions about time spent using media and which media they choose to use.

3.7 Making decisions for other people about media access or content is not MLE.

4. Media Literacy Education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

4.1 MLE promotes student interest in news and current events as a dimension of citizenship, and can enhance student understanding of First Amendment rights and responsibilities.

4.2 MLE is designed to create citizens who are skeptical, not cynical.

4.3 MLE gives students the skills they need to take responsibility for their own media use.

4.4 MLE invites and respects diverse points of view.

4.5 MLE explores representations, misrepresentations and lack of representation of cultures and countries in the global community.

4.6 MLE values independently produced media.

4.7 MLE trains students to examine how media structures (e.g., ownership, distribution, etc.) influence the ways that people make meaning of media messages.

4.8 MLE recognizes that HOW we teach matters as much as WHAT we teach. Classrooms should be places where student input is respected, valued and acted upon.

4.9 MLE is not partisan. (continued on next page)

4.10 MLE is not a substitute for government regulation of media, nor is government regulation a substitute for MLE.

4.11 Censorship or other efforts aimed at keeping selected media beyond the access of selected audiences do not achieve the skill-building goals of MLE.

4.12 MLE is not a substitute for media meeting their responsibility to serve the public interest. At the same time it is not about media bashing, i.e., simplistic, rhetorical, or over-generalized attacks on some types of media or media industries as a whole

5. Media Literacy Education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
5.1 MLE integrates media texts that present diverse voices, perspectives and communities.

5.2 MLE includes opportunities to examine alternative media and international perspectives.

5.3 MLE addresses topics like violence, gender, sexuality, racism, stereotyping and other issues of representation.

5.4 MLE shares with media owners, producers, and members of the creative community responsibility for facilitating mutual understanding of the effects of media on individuals and on society.

5.5 MLE does not start from a premise that media are inconsequential nor that media are a problem.

5.6 MLE does not excuse media makers from their responsibility as members of the community to make a positive contribution and avoid doing harm.

6. Media Literacy Education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE:
6.1 MLE is not about teaching students what to think; it is about teaching them how they can arrive at informed choices that are most consistent with their own values.

6.2 MLE helps students become aware of and reflect on the meaning that they make of media messages, including how the meaning they make relates to their own values.

6.3 MLE is not about revealing to students the "true" or "correct" or "hidden" meaning of media messages, nor is it about identifying which media messages are "good" and which ones are "bad." In MLE, media analysis is an exploration of riches, rather than "right" readings.

6.4 MLE recognizes that students' interpretations of media texts may differ from the teacher's interpretation without being wrong.

6.5 MLE recognizes and welcomes the different media experiences of individuals of varying ages.

6.6 MLE uses group discussion and analysis of media messages to help students understand and appreciate different perspectives and points of view.

6.7 MLE facilitates growth, understanding and appreciation through an examination of tastes, choices and preferences.

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