Chapter 10

Media Literacy Instruction Using Technology

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ABSTRACT

This study explored whether sixth grade students can substantially improve their recognition and understanding of the techniques of persuasion used by the mass media after receiving direct instruction in media literacy using technology. The result showed that students substantially improved their knowledge of persuasive techniques after receiving direct instruction in media literacy. No particular characteristics of the participants appeared to put them at a particular advantage or disadvantage related to learning or achievement as a result of direct instruction. However, there was a significant relationship between students who reported discussing advertising with their parents during the intervention period and students’ movement from non-proficient to proficient levels on the intervention assessments. This finding was significant at the p = .048 level.

INTRODUCTION

Mass media has a tremendous influence upon the daily decisions people make about their health, their finances, their political choices, and much more. Much of the power of the media lies in its pervasive nature. Many of the values that are communicated are not stated outright, yet somehow, the messages are received. People elicit their ideas about what is and is not desirable and/or acceptable from the media in many aspects of their lives, ranging from trivial matters such as clothing trends to things of a more serious nature, such as desired body shape and even one’s personal identity.
(Torres & Mercado, 2006). This information is transmitted by subtle references to things that may not even appear in the message at hand; the viewer is expected to infer meaning (Ferguson, 1999). Because the messages or values being communicated are not explicitly stated, people may not even think to question them. Even if one were inclined to do so, the constant stream of information makes analysis difficult. So much is happening in media messages, and at such a rapid pace, that there is literally no time to stop and think.

Children are exposed to more than double the amount of media exposure than adults are. According to the Kaiser Foundation, 68% of teens have their own TV, nearly one-third have their own personal computer, and less than one half reported any supervision of their media usage (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Children between the ages of 8 and 18 years of age are bombarded each and every day by approximately 8 ½ hours of media messages. This amount of exposure is made possible by “media multitasking,” the practice of using more than one medium at a time; for example, surfing the Internet while listening to the radio (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005).

Statistics like this are particularly disturbing when one stops to consider the amount of time children spend with the media in comparison to the amount of time they spend with their parents or guardians. Parents have obligations that limit the time they have to spend with their children. A job, housework, food shopping and other domestic chores are just a few of the many demands that parents must juggle in addition to their child-rearing duties. Children themselves often have a full schedule of extra-curricular activities such as sports practice, dance lessons, music lessons or religious instruction which may require a commitment of daily practice in addition to scheduled meetings. It is highly unlikely that children spend anywhere near eight hours a day with their parents, so the media has the advantage of exposure over time. Children are also more inclined to argue with their parents’ point of view, whereas they likely to accept the messages they are receiving from the media without question.

As a child watches hour after hour of television, he or she is subjected to a plethora of messages embedded in the television shows and advertisements that are designed to serve the needs of the creators of those messages. Because young children have a tendency to believe what they see, these messages are accepted at face value, without any sort of filter. This is especially dangerous because today’s media messages are very sophisticated and use a multi-sensory approach to engage the viewer. The combined use of images and sounds make a much deeper impression than either one alone, and are more likely to have a lasting effect upon the viewer (Torres & Mercado, 2006).

Television in particular affects our perception of reality, our values, and our use of leisure time, and has a major impact on socialization in our society (Brown,
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