Teaching Critical Reading: Media Literacy in the High School Classroom

Alisha Reed Anderson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation


This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.
TEACHING CRITICAL READING: MEDIA LITERACY IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

Alisha Reed Anderson

Bachelor of Arts
Wright State University, 2006

Master of Education
Wright State University, 2007

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education in
Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education
University of South Carolina
2019

Accepted by:

Susan Schramm-Pate, Major Professor
Yasha Becton, Committee Member
Linda Silvernail, Committee Member
Kenneth Vogler, Committee Member
Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee for their time, their support, and their feedback. I would especially like to thank Dr. Schramm-Pate, my major professor, for her patient guidance and constructive criticism throughout this process.

This journey would not have been possible without the love and support of my family and friends:

To my husband, Maynard, thank you for your unparalleled support and your unwavering faith in me. You have been my greatest source of encouragement, and I truly could not have done this without you.

To my grandparents, Glenn and Louraine, thank you for impressing upon me the value of education and for fostering in me the determination to achieve my goals.

To my father, Jeff, thank you for always believing in me and for your (and Vicki’s) impeccable timing in sending messages of love and encouragement.

To Ben and Marilyn, thank you for your insight and your belief in me and my work. Your sense of perspective helped me stay grounded.

To my dear friends Katie, Keeley, Meredith, and Robert, thank you for your friendship, your support, and your laughter.

To my Cohort G peers, thank you for your camaraderie. It has been a pleasure learning with and from you all.
ABSTRACT

The present qualitative action research study was conducted to examine student-participant perceptions and performance in a critical media literacy unit in an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) classroom. Critical media literacy skills and, specifically, rhetorical analysis skills, are tested on the end-of-course AP ELC exam. The teacher-researcher designed a four-week unit, Reading Mass Media, and implemented it with 38 student-participants in two sections of AP ELC taught by the teacher-researcher in a racially and economically diverse rural South Carolina high school. The purpose of the present action research is to describe student-participants’ performance and perceptions during the implementation of the Unit, which included rhetorical analysis of several popular culture texts (e.g., print advertisements, commercials, and movie trailers) as well as an investigation of issues of representation in the media. Though various types of media texts were used in the Unit, print advertisements were prioritized because student-participants from low socioeconomic backgrounds may have had limited access to online texts, which could affect their readiness to apply and develop new literacies. Action research methodology was used to answer the research question: What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class? Data collection included a pretest and pre-instruction survey, classroom observations, a posttest and post-instruction survey, and a focus-group interview. The pretest and posttest examined changes in student-participant performance, and the pre-
and post-instructional surveys examined changes in student-participant perspectives. Classroom observations and the focus-group interview were used for polyangulation. Findings include the following themes: The Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, promoted the critical reading of media texts, and encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis. The teacher-researcher used these themes to develop an action plan, which includes updating the Unit for use with future AP ELC classes, developing professional development sessions to share findings and strategies, and working with district officials to design a media literacy course.

*Keywords*: action research, critical media literacy, English language arts, representation, rhetorical analysis of popular cultural texts.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................. iii
Abstract................................................................................................................................................ iv
List of Tables ................................................................................................................................. viii
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................... ix
Chapter One: Research Overview............................................................................................... 1
Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................................... 35
Chapter Three: Methodology .......................................................................................................... 79
Chapter Four: Findings and Interpretations ................................................................................. 94
Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Action Plan.............................................................. 163
References......................................................................................................................................... 188
Appendix A: Unit Outline................................................................................................................. 212
Appendix B: Unit Alignment to AP ELC Course Description......................................................... 215
Appendix C: Unit Alignment to SCCCR Standards ....................................................................... 223
Appendix D: Pretest/Posttest ............................................................................................................ 226
Appendix E: Ad Scavenger Hunt....................................................................................................... 228
Appendix F: Culminating Project...................................................................................................... 229
Appendix G: Media Literacy Smartphone......................................................................................... 232
Appendix H: Magazines for Analysis............................................................................................... 233
Appendix I: Magazine Advertisement Analysis Graphic Organizer ........................................... 234
Appendix J: Conceptual Framework of Study Design ................................................................. 236
Appendix K: Fieldnotes Page ................................................................. 237
Appendix L: Group Discussion Checklist ............................................. 238
Appendix M: Pre-Instruction Survey ...................................................... 239
Appendix N: Post-Instruction Survey ..................................................... 241
Appendix O: Informed Consent Form .................................................... 243
Appendix P: Focus-Group Interview Protocol ....................................... 244
Appendix Q: Sample Student-Participant Counter-Advertisements .......... 245
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Summary of Student-Participant Demographic Data ...........................................24
Table 4.1 Overview of Core Theme One ..............................................................................106
Table 4.2 Overview of Core Theme Two ............................................................................107
Table 4.3 Overview of Core Theme Three ..........................................................................108
Table 4.4 Overview of Core Theme Four ...........................................................................109
Table 4.5 Overview of Core Theme Five ..........................................................................110
Table 4.6 All Students’ Results from the Pre-Instruction Survey ........................................138
Table 4.7 All Students’ Results from the Post-Instruction Survey .......................................142
Table 4.8 Changes in Frequency Distribution from Pre- to Post-Instructional Survey ..........143
Table 4.9 All Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results ............................................................145
Table 4.10 Male Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results ......................................................148
Table 4.11 Female Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results ...................................................149
Table 4.12 White Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results .....................................................151
Table 4.13 Students of Color’s Likert-Type Survey Results ................................................152
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Pre-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 1 ......................112
Figure 4.2 Pre-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 2 ......................113
Figure 4.3 Post-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 1 ....................124
Figure 4.4 Post-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 2 ....................125
CHAPTER ONE
RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

Academics and researchers have called for increased media literacy for nearly fifty years (Kellner & Share, 2007a; National Council of Teachers of English, 1970, 1975; Postman, 1985). However, Kellner and Share (2007c) report that media literacy, and particularly critical forms of media literacy, coined “critical media literacy” (CML), is still absent in many English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms in the United States.

The present Dissertation in Practice (DiP) describes the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit implementing CML, titled Reading Mass Media. This Unit, described in further detail later in this chapter, introduced student-participants to the difficult skills of rhetorical analysis by teaching them how to analyze visual media texts, emphasizing persuasive appeals, target audience(s), and patterns of stereotyping and representation. Though most analysis involved print advertisements, some lessons involved analyzing commercials, movie trailers, and reality television clips. All texts analyzed were examined for both rhetorical intent (what the text creators sought to do) as well as rhetorical impact (the text’s potential effects on its various audiences).

Using action research methodology, the teacher-researcher collected qualitative data, which included a pretest and posttest, pre- and post-instruction student surveys with Likert-type rating scales and open-ended semi-structured interview questions, classroom observations, and a focus-group with student-participants. Reciprocity was attained by
an iterative process of reflection and discussion among participants during the research process. As the teacher-researcher, I conducted member-checking to ensure accuracy of reporting, allowing student-participants to review interview transcripts and observation notes (Mertler, 2017; Mills, 2007). I practiced reflexivity by maintaining a reflective journal throughout the study, continually reflecting upon data collection and interpretation (Heikkinen, Huttunen, & Syrjälä, 2007; Mertler, 2017; Mills, 2007).

The findings of this present action research (AR) study suggest that the Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, promoted the critical reading of media texts, and encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis.

**Topic and Background**

Critical media literacy has an important role in our changing society and can be achieved in an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) classroom. AP ELC is a rhetoric and composition course that focuses on the Aristotelian rhetorical analysis of written and visual texts (Aristotle & Kennedy, 1991/2006; College Board, 2014). Recent feedback from College Board (2016) indicates that on the AP ELC exam, many students nationwide failed to critically evaluate media texts, often regarding blogs, journalism, and academic articles as equal in terms of credibility (para. 12). There is high pressure for student-participants to perform well on this exam because it determines whether they will receive college credit for the course.
I designed the unit *Reading Mass Media* to incorporate the pedagogical principles of critical media literacy (CML) in order to engage my student-participants in the rhetorical analysis of media texts so they would improve their scores on the ELC Exam. In the Unit, my southern, rural student-participants examined media texts as cultural artifacts (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999) and focused on media representations as *re-presentations* of reality (Hobbs, 2007). As Baker (2016) explains,

> The media don’t just offer us a window on the world. They don’t just present reality, they represent it. Media producers inevitably make choices: they select and combine, they make events into stories, they create characters, they invite us to see the world in a particular way. (p. 5)

In this Unit, my student-participants learned “deconstruction techniques” from post-structural theory and analyzed issues of representation (Baker, 2017; Derrida, 1992; Hobbs, 2007), including who is (and is not) represented and how they are (and are not) represented, as rhetorical choices made by the producers of a particular media text, such as an advertisement. By problematizing the idea of representation in media texts, the Unit enabled the student-participants to improve their critical and rhetorical analysis skills by exposing the constructed nature of such texts.

I followed the foundations of CML, a more critical approach to media education that embraces Freirean (1970/2000) problem-posing education and aligns with the goals of AP ELC, which include developing critical literacy and facilitating informed citizenship (College Board, 2014). As CML theorists Kellner and Share (2005) explain:

> [I]t is not enough to merely understand media, students need to be empowered to critically negotiate meanings, engage with the problems of misrepresentations and
under-representations, and produce their own alternative media. Addressing issues of inequality and injustice in media representations can be a powerful starting place for problem-posing transformative education. Critical media literacy offers the tools and framework to help students become subjects in the process of deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a better society. (p. 382)

By using CML instruction to investigate issues of representation in popular culture, I created what Dewey (1938) describes as a moving experience that “arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future” (p. 38). To engage my student-participants, I found texts that related to their lived world experiences in order to increase their interest and engagement and to help them do analysis with patience and fortitude.

**Problem of Practice Statement**

Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) requires students to conduct rhetorical analysis, a technique that involves teaching students how to critically analyze texts for their rhetorical, as opposed to aesthetic, function (College Board, 2014). At Lowcountry High School (LHS) (pseudonym), some student-participants enter my AP ELC class without a clear understanding of how to do rhetorical analysis, which is a core skill tested on the end-of-course standardized exam required for AP credit. Though student performance on the AP ELC exam has improved over the past five years, the existing curriculum and pedagogy at LHS did not adequately prepare my southern, rural student-participants for the level of rhetorical analysis required on the AP ELC exam (College Board 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). As the teacher-
researcher, I conducted a thorough review of existing curriculum and pedagogy, and I found that LHS’s existing AP ELC curriculum did not include units that focused on the development of media literacy skills. Therefore, in an effort to work with my student-participants to create an access point for them to do the difficult skill of rhetorical analysis, I designed and implemented a unit that combined rhetorical analysis and critical media literacy, called Reading Mass Media. In the Unit, student-participants engaged in meta-learning about media (Mears, 2010) and rhetorically analyzed a variety of media texts, such as advertisements and television commercials. I developed this constructivist media literacy unit to challenge the “banking” model of education made famous by Paulo Freire (1970/2000) that is traditionally used at LHS to teach reading comprehension and critical analysis skills.

**Research Question**

> What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this action research study is to design and implement the unit Reading Mass Media with my AP ELC student-participants at LHS. The secondary purpose is to describe the impact the Unit had with my student-participants. To accomplish these goals, data from AP ELC student-participants at LHS, including a pretest and pre-instruction survey, classroom observations, a posttest and post-instruction survey, and a focus-group interview, were collected and reflexively analyzed. The tertiary purpose is to use the findings of this present study to design an action plan to adjust the Unit for future use with students at LHS.
**Unit: Reading Mass Media**

Through its critical, dialogic nature, the unit taught in this study, *Reading Mass Media*, was designed to prepare my student-participants for the rigor of the AP ELC exam and future courses, as well as enable them to be informed and engaged citizens in their adult lives. Rather than teaching to the test, I sought to help my student-participants develop the rhetorical analysis skills required for success on the AP ELC exam by teaching them how to do rhetorical analysis with media texts, which are more familiar and accessible. This approach is also recommended in the AP ELC Course Description:

> In AP English Language and Composition courses, as in most college composition courses, most classroom instruction is focused on reading and composing script or print texts to develop students’ skills as readers and writers. But the familiar appearance of other media in contemporary composition courses (e.g., speeches, songs, documentary films, television ad campaigns) and on the AP English Language and Composition Exam (e.g., pictures, graphs, charts) acknowledges the much broader reach of rhetoric into nonverbal media. Because many high school and college students perform more rhetorical action in aural and visual media than in writing, college and AP English Language and Composition teachers must help students recognize ways in which written texts can and do perform social action, just as those other (perhaps more familiar) media texts. (College Board, 2014, p. 19)

In this Unit, my student-participants learned the skills of rhetorical analysis by using texts that were more accessible and more relevant to their lived experiences. As discussed in Chapter Four, student-participants described this as a “shortcut” that allowed them to
develop the skills required to analyze the more traditional forms of texts that appear on the AP ELC exam.

Though the Unit drew from a variety of resources, I relied most heavily on the works of Hobbs (2007, 2011, 2017), Baker (2016), and Scheibe and Rogow (2012). Additional details about the Unit are provided in this section as well as the appendices, which include the unit outline (Appendix A), alignment to AP ELC course goals (College Board, 2014) (Appendix B), alignment to South Carolina College and Career Readiness Standards (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015) (Appendix C), and unit assessments (Appendices D, E, and F).

The idea of representation in the media (Baker, 2016; Common Sense Media, 2016, 2017; Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009) is interwoven throughout the Unit, but most of the Unit involves developing essential media literacy skills, including visual literacy (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012) and specific deconstruction techniques that relate to the skills of rhetorical analysis (Baker, 2016; Hobbs, 2007). The beginning of the Unit, described further below, helps student-participants develop schema (Potter, 2004) to ensure they have the foundational skills necessary to engage in the higher-level media analysis and production activities that take place later in the Unit, such as the culminating project, which includes both a rhetorical analysis essay and a counter-advertisement (Appendix F).

**Unit Description**

The Unit took place at the beginning of the year as part of an ongoing introduction to the skills of rhetorical analysis. As many of my student-participants had little if any experience with studying media texts, the Unit began with an introduction to
critical thinking, visual literacy, and media literacy (Baker, 2016; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012). Discussion revealed that though student-participants are often told to think critically, they did not know what skills and practices are associated with critical thinking. We used Baker’s (2016) description of critical thinking in the context of media literacy to guide our examination of critical thinking. Student-participants read the descriptions, rated themselves on the skills and practices described, and wrote personal reflections about how well they believe they engage in critical thinking.

The Unit introduction also included discussion of literacy as “reading the word and the world” (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987) as well as the role of critical thinking, social criticism, and media literacy in contemporary society. Central to this discussion was The Center for Media Literacy’s Five Core Concepts:

1. All media messages are “constructed.”
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media are organized to gain profit and/or power. (TCML, 2018)

These Core Concepts are endorsed by Kellner and Share’s (2005) conception of critical media literacy, which was a guiding force in the critical component of this Unit. Furthermore, the Core Concepts are extremely relevant to AP ELC because they relate to ideas central to rhetorical analysis. TCML (2018) aligns these Core Concepts to the keywords authorship, format, audience, content, and purpose—terms frequently used in the AP ELC classroom, particularly in relationship to the rhetorical triangle (Lutzke &
Henggeler, 2009), which was first introduced to student-participants at the beginning of the year and is used throughout the course to help contextualize rhetorical analysis.

In addition to the Core Concepts, the Unit emphasizes four of Baker’s (2016) Big Ideas in Media Literacy: critical inquiry, representation, stereotypes, and economic concerns (advertising, sponsorship, etc.). Student-participants critiqued the politics of representation, which relates to who is being represented, how they are being represented, who is being omitted, what stereotypes are being reinforced and/or challenged (Baker, 2016; Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007a). After an initial introduction to the concept of representation, where we brainstormed stereotypes in film and television (Baker, 2016), we watched Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s (2009) TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story,” where she discusses stereotypes as “single stories” that give us incomplete, potentially damaging understandings of people and places. Student-participants then wrote personal reflections on the TED Talk. Student-participants were struck by Adichie’s (2009) assertion that “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make the one story become the only story.” Ultimately, the idea of the “single story” became part of the ongoing conversation in the Unit, with student-participants referring back to it repeatedly, including in the post-instruction survey and focus-group interview.

Student-participants frequently brought issues related to representation into their analysis. This was particularly true when using the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018), a small, two-sided card that includes the Key Questions of Media Literacy (originally published by Hobbs, 2007, 2011, 2017) and a series of “apps” for critically analyzing media texts (reality check, stereotype alert, values check, read
between the lines, solutions too easy, and so on) (Appendix G). When analyzing advertisements and reality television clips, student-participants often discussed patterns of stereotyping and representation. During whole-class discussion, I encouraged student-participants to share their interpretations, acting as a facilitator and allowing them to frame the analysis while providing guidance and probing questions as needed. Discussions were lively and enriched by various perspectives and interpretations, and the post-instructional survey and focus-group interview revealed that many student-participants found these diverse perspectives and interpretations to be one of the most impactful aspects of the Unit.

Throughout the Unit, student-participants engaged in meta-learning with and about media (Mears, 2010). After establishing a media literacy foundation and scaffolding key terminology, concepts, and skills, student-participants engaged in the deconstruction and rhetorical analysis of a variety of media texts, primarily consisting of print advertisements and commercials. The persuasive nature of such texts was deemed particularly relevant for AP ELC as it allows analysis of both rhetorical intent and impact by examining the relationship between the text creator, the text itself, and the intended audience(s). To examine the role of target audience in advertising, student-participants completed an activity that had them identify their own demographics and list specific types of media associated with their demographic (Kuglich, 2018). This understanding was then applied to the investigation of how target audience affects content in the print advertisements and commercials analyzed.

Though a variety of media texts were examined over the course of the Unit, most analysis was done using magazine advertisements. Before the Unit began, I bought an
assortment of magazines representing various target audiences. The total number of magazines exceeded the number of student-participants in my largest class to ensure all students would have multiple magazines from which to choose. I cut out the front cover, the table of contents, all of the advertisements, and the back cover of each magazine, then placed these pages in sheet protectors and bound them using loose-leaf binder rings (Appendix H). I had multiple reasons for following this process, including promoting cultural relevance, emphasizing the importance of target audience, highlighting the sheer number of advertisements in magazines, and removing any objectionable content.

In the first assignment using these magazines, each student-participant selected a magazine and completed a graphic organizer that focused primarily on issues related to target audience and representation (Appendix I). When we began rhetorical analysis of individual advertisements, we first analyzed a few teacher-selected advertisements as a class using the rhetorical triangle, the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018), and a variety of deconstruction techniques (Baker, 2016). Though student-participants were permitted to bring in their own advertisements for individual and group analysis assignments, most student-participants continued to use the magazines selected for magazine analysis.

In this Unit, student-participants learned to be both critical consumers and active creators of media content. For example, in the culminating project, student-participants selected an advertisement, wrote a rhetorical analysis essay, and created a counter-narrative in the form of a counter-advertisement (Appendix F). Throughout the Unit, student-participants engaged in Socratic dialogue and reflective practices, including small- and whole-group discussions, where student-participants discussed a range of
topics related to media and representation, from analyzing specific media texts to
discussing observations about the media they consume, in order to build critical praxis
(Larson & Marsh, 2015).

**Unit Design**

The Unit was designed according to frameworks provided by media literacy

Central to the Unit’s implementation are the Five Key Questions of Media Literacy:

1. Who is the author and what is the purpose?
2. What techniques are used to attract and hold your attention?
3. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are being represented?
4. How might different people interpret the message?

Like the TCML’s (2018) Five Concepts, the Five Key Questions address authorship, format, audience, content, and purpose; however, their formulation as questions rather than as statements is designed to encourage a more inquiry-based approach for analysis. Though all five questions relate directly to rhetorical analysis, questions three, four, and five are particularly relevant to the politics of representation (Kellner & Share, 2007a).
The Five Key Questions were a key component of the Unit construction, utilized on the pretest and posttest (Appendix D) and through the use of the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018; see Appendix G), which was used with a variety of media texts analyzed throughout the Unit.

The Unit is designed to address a wide variety of South Carolina Career and College Readiness Standards (SCDOE, 2015) as well as College Board’s (2014) two overarching course goals for AP ELC: developing critical literacy and facilitating informed citizenship (p. 11). Critical literacy, a Freirean approach to literacy grounded in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987), was used to develop the unit Reading Mass Media. More specifically, the Unit includes a Freirean emphasis on praxis (reflection and action), dialogue, and the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Through rhetorical analysis of media texts, the Unit examines how such texts represent, reinforce, and challenge particular ways of viewing the world and the people within it.

Scholarly Literature

Scholarly literature related to media literacy (Baker, 2016; Hobbs, 2007), critical media literacy (Garcia, Seglem, & Share, 2013; Kellner & Share, 2005; Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & López, 2013), and teaching with popular culture (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Daniels, 2012; Kellner & Share, 2005; Kellner & Share, 2007b) was used to design the Unit used in this present study. As the teacher-researcher, I developed and implemented this Unit with my student-participants in response to the identified Problem of Practice. This pedagogical approach was selected due to its constructivist and critical nature, which challenges the traditional lecture-based format used in most LHS classes,
enabling student-participants to work together to construct knowledge about texts they selected that relate to their lived world experiences. Research indicates that media literacy instruction can improve both reading comprehension and critical analysis skills (Hobbs, 2007) and that non-traditional texts, such as multimedia and popular culture texts, can support students’ developing literacy by providing an increase in access, interest, and motivation (Bell, 2017; Fingon, 2012; Gunter & Kenny, 2008; Young & Daunic, 2012). These ideas are further developed in Chapter Two.

**Media Literacy**

On November 30, 1975, the National Council of Teachers of English (2016) issued the Resolution on Promoting Media Literacy, which signified a dedication to encouraging media literacy education in English Language Arts classrooms:

This resolution grew out of awareness among educators that understanding the new media and using them constructively and creatively actually required developing a new form of literacy—new critical abilities “in reading, listening, viewing, and thinking” that would enable students to deal constructively with complex new modes of delivering information, new multisensory tactics for persuasion, and new technology-based art forms. (para. 1)

Since 1975, the integration of media literacy into many ELA classrooms in the United States has faced many obstacles, such as lack of awareness of and understanding in the field of media literacy; resistance from educators, administrators, and communities; tensions between educators and the motivations of commercial enterprises; and the pressures of standardized testing placed on schools, teachers, and students (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Kubey, 1998, 2003; Schwarz, 2005).
Critical Media Literacy

Critical media literacy (CML), influenced by works such as Masterman’s *Teaching the Media* (1985) and Buckingham’s *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (2003), brought a shift in the purpose and direction of media education: Rather than a “specific body of knowledge or set of skills” to be obtained, it is now seen as “a framework of conceptual understandings” to be analyzed and evaluated (Garcia, Seglem, & Share, 2013). CML goes beyond access and appreciation, instead incorporating aspects of critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007b), a combination of influences that allows the educator to effectively incorporate social justice issues into media education by evaluating how some media messages “reinforce stereotypes and encourage people to feel badly about themselves and others” (Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & López, 2013, p. 3).

Kellner and Share (2005) posit the value of CML lies in its ability to help educators meet “the dual challenges of teaching media literacy in a multicultural society and sensitizing students and the public to the inequalities and injustices of a society based on gender, race, and class inequalities and discrimination” (p. 370). The unit that I designed for the present action research study embodies these principles by enabling my high school student-participants to engage in rhetorical analyses of media texts and critiques of media representations of gender, race, and ethnicity in order to improve their rhetorical analysis skills and to promote critical thinking skills that will help them be successful as students and as citizens.
Teaching with Popular Culture

Since as early as the 1990s, scholars have recommended teaching CML through popular culture (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Daniels, 2012; Kellner & Share, 2005; Kellner & Share, 2007b). Though incorporating the analysis of popular culture texts can increase student interest and encourage active meaning-making (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000), it also requires negotiating the politics of pleasure. As Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) explain:

[Teachers] must be cognizant of the struggle that often emerges as a result of committing to both the pleasure principle and the process of critical analysis. Establishing an understanding of the importance of pleasure builds awareness of its relevance to students’ lives and assists teachers in developing curricula that not only recognize but also challenge students to think beyond the pleasures derived from popular culture texts. (p. 31)

Rather than pure pleasure or pure criticism, this Unit engaged student-participants in critical enjoyment by encouraging critical analysis that is interesting, fulfilling, and enjoyable for student-participants in a classroom that uses active learning, collaboration, reflection, and mutual learning and respect (Redmond, 2012). To encourage this, the Unit involves the examination of popular culture texts with problematic as well as positive, pro-social messages. For example, the advertisement used for the pretest and posttest (Appendix D) depicts two women of different racial identities working together, and the text in the advertisement alludes to the Golden Rule (treating others as you want to be treated). Additionally, our study of advertisements and commercials includes discussion of marketing trends, including many brands, such as Dove and Nike,
embracing a marketing strategy that involves channeling social movements to target Millennial and Post-Millennial consumers (Fromm, 2013; Rische, 2018; Townsend, 2018).

**Conceptual Framework**

Critical media literacy, as implemented in this action research study, emerges at the intersection of multiple educational philosophies and theories, including progressivism (Dewey, 1916, 1938), critical theory (Freire, 1970/2000), and constructivism (Adams, 2006; Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2007; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Kincheloe, 2005). These philosophies are summarized below and will be further explored in Chapter Two. For a conceptual framework of the study design, please see Appendix J.

**Progressivism**

Progressive education is a student-centered philosophy informed by the works of John Dewey, an influential educational theorist from the early- to mid- twentieth century. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) delineates traditional and progressive approaches to education. He describes traditional educational approaches as “imposition from above and from outside,” as opposed to progressive educational approaches that focus on “expression and cultivation of individuality,” “free activity,” and “learning from experience” (p. 19). While all three of these points are important and influential in my philosophy and approach, it is the last point that is most relevant to this study.

Dewey emphasizes that students should learn from what he describes as *educative* experiences, those that encourage present and future growth, as opposed to *mis-educative* experiences, those that distort or arrest future growth (p. 25). Educative experiences are
engaging and meaningful, promoting positive future experiences by encouraging continuous and forward-moving intellectual and moral growth where “every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 25). One example of an assignment intended to create an educative experience is the introduction of representation and stereotyping, which included Adichie’s (2009) TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story.” Not only did the insight student-participants gained enrich subsequent discussion and analysis, it also affected student-participants emotionally and intellectually, with several discussing its impact in the post-instructional survey and the focus-group interview. This also allowed student-participants to relate popular culture dominant narratives to their lived world experiences.

**Critical Theory**

Critical media literacy is strongly influenced by Freirean critical theory, also known as critical pedagogy. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, mid-twentieth century Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970/2000) critiques the “banking” model of education, where the student’s role is that of a passive receptacle to be filled with knowledge, and the teacher’s role is that of depositor. In place of this traditional approach, Freire (1970/2000) proposes problem-posing education, where the teacher “pos[es] the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (p. 79) and learns alongside the students, in partnership, as “critical co-investigators in dialogue” (p. 81).

This approach was used in this study through the design and implementation of the Unit. By problematizing representation in the media and guiding student-participants through dialectical thought, reflection, and dialoguing, I worked with my student-participants to unveil reality and “confront [it] critically, simultaneously objectifying and
acting upon that reality” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 52). Throughout the Unit, student-participants conducted critical analysis of media texts, and in the culminating project, they selected an advertisement which they viewed to be problematic in its representation, deconstructed it, and engaged in critical action by developing a counter-advertisement, a type of counter-narrative (Appendix F). Such activities are particularly relevant to Freirean theory because Freire (1970/2000) himself argued that technology is often used for “the maintenance of the oppressive order through manipulation and repression” (p. 60). By developing counter-narratives, student-participants were able to confront and challenge dominant and oppressive narratives.

**Constructivism**

This Unit also engages student-participants in constructivist learning. Constructivism, a learning theory that emerged in the early twentieth century, has evolved in recent decades to include social constructivism (Adams, 2006; Ertmer & Newby, 2013) and critical constructivism (Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2007; Fleury & Garrison, 2014; Kincheloe, 2005). According to constructivist thought, individuals make meaning by actively constructing knowledge through personal interaction with the environment, with each new experience interpreted in the context of the experience itself as well as all preceding knowledge and events (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

In this Unit, student-participants engage in meta-learning by learning with and about media (Mears, 2010), bringing their previous experiences with media texts to each assignment, building upon their previous knowledge through constructivist-based activities. For example, one lesson in the advertising portion of the Unit involves an activity where student-participants examine magazine covers, tables of contents, and
advertisements, to help them develop an understanding of how advertisers market to that particular magazine’s target audience (for assignment, see Appendix I). By having student-participants rhetorically analyze visual media texts, I endeavored to help them develop a better understanding of what rhetorical analysis entails so we could continue to build upon that understanding throughout the course.

Like Freirean (1970/2000) critical pedagogy, constructivism challenges “banking” methods of education that view knowledge as something to be “deposited” into students, and critical constructivism, in particular, also examines hierarchical relationships of power and marginalization as related to knowledge acquisition, development, and validation (Kincheloe, 2005). This view of learning is especially important in this study, as the Unit uses CML to engage student-participants in active, critical analysis of media texts and includes an examination of how representations of people and their relationship to each other and the world inform the way we view the world and the people within it. Though the beginning of the Unit includes some foundational and conceptual learning to establish essential schema for media literacy (Potter, 2004), the bulk of the Unit involves the critical examination of media texts, where student-participants actively construct their understanding of how media representations inform and distort perceptions of reality.

**Action Research Methodology**

Using a qualitative design, this action research project utilizes data collected in several ways to allow for polyangulation, which Mertler (2017) recommends as a strategy of increasing rigor in action research. Data were collected by multiple methods advocated by Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014). To evaluate student engagement throughout the Unit, the teacher-researcher conducted observations, which were recorded
using fieldnotes (Appendix K) and a group discussion checklist (Appendix L).

Observations, which were video-recorded and lasted between five and thirty minutes, were conducted while student-participants were working on assignments in small groups. To help student-participants get comfortable with the recording device, it remained stationary in the classroom throughout the study. The teacher-researcher also discussed with student-participants her reasons for recording these observation periods, encouraging student-participants to ask questions to better understand her goals. To document student perceptions, the student-participants completed a survey at the beginning (Appendix M) and end of the unit (Appendix N), and the teacher-researcher used both survey results and observations to guide the focus-group interview with student-participants at the end of the unit. To evaluate student performance, the student-participants completed a pretest and a posttest (Appendix D). Adapted with permission from Renee Hobbs (2007; personal communication, February 12, 2017), in this assessment student-participants analyzed a magazine advertisement by responding to open-ended questions relating to target audience, purpose, text, and subtext. These methods are more detailed in Chapter Three.

**Research Site and Participants**

In line with the context-specific nature of action research, the research site and participants will be drawn from the teacher-researcher’s professional context. LHS is a large school in a small town in South Carolina. The school is part of a county-wide district, and the students come from several feeder middle schools in the surrounding area. The student body is racially and economically diverse: 46% of students are people of color, and 54% of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
(National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Though the region is growing and experiencing demographic shifts, most students are from families who have lived in the LHS attendance zone for multiple generations. The surrounding community is highly conservative, and the approach to education at LHS is generally teacher-centered and traditional in nature, with an emphasis on teaching to the test. Obtaining approval for implementing this Unit and conducting this study was difficult, taking several weeks and requiring a meeting with the teacher-researcher and multiple school-level administrators.

**Student-participants.** This study involves 38 student-participants who are enrolled in two sections of AP ELC taught by the teacher-researcher at Lowcountry High School (pseudonym), an ethnically and economically diverse public school in rural South Carolina. The teacher-researcher collected demographic data from student-participants themselves, allowing them to self-identify their race and gender. Twenty-eight student-participants are female, nine are male, and one is MtF transgender; 22 student-participants are White, 12 are Black, and four are mixed-race. According to data obtained from PowerTeacher (2018), two student-participants are English Language Learners with high levels of English proficiency. The student-participants come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and 15 student-participants are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Thirty-seven student-participants are in eleventh grade, and one student is in twelfth grade. Though most student-participants have achievement levels corresponding at or slightly above grade-level, five student-participants have Lexile scores that reveal pronounced deficiencies. All student-participants are college-bound, with aspirations of going into a variety of fields, including medicine, fine arts, education, engineering, legal studies, and the military. To ensure confidentiality, student-
participants were assigned pseudonyms for this study. For demographic information for each student-participant, see Table 1.1.

Throughout the study, feedback from my student-participants helped me develop the Unit and adapt it to better serve their needs. For example, though my intention was initially to create a high-interest unit that would help them improve their rhetorical analysis skills, an early discussion with my student-participants revealed that many student-participants were unclear what the term rhetorical analysis actually meant. To obtain more information about this important piece of data, I added three questions related specifically to student-participants’ understanding of and comfort with rhetorical analysis to the pre- and post-instructional surveys. In the pre-instructional survey, the findings of which are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, I discovered many student-participants had little understanding of or comfort with rhetorical analysis. As a result, the nature of my implementation of the Unit shifted to include more dialogue about how what we were doing reflected the skills of rhetorical analysis. Though subtle, this change in approach appears to have had a meaningful effect: The post-instructional survey revealed significant increases for the items related to the skills of rhetorical analysis, marking this as one of the most impactful aspects of the Unit for student-participants. As described in the action plan in Chapter Five, student-participant responses to the post-instructional survey and focus-group interview were used to determine what changes need to be made to the Unit prior to its next implementation as well as areas of focus for future cycles of action research.
# Table 1.1

**Summary of Student-Participant Demographic Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Student-Identified Race</th>
<th>Student-Identified Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Black, Pacific Islander, White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Black, White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Asian, White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MtF Transgender*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>Asian, White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This student-participant presents male and prefers to use male pseudonym and pronouns. When data were disaggregated by gender, his data was sorted with males, per his request."
Teacher-researcher. The teacher-researcher, a certified English teacher with eleven years of experience (all at LHS), was a full participant in this study. She worked closely with student-participants to reinforce their rhetorical analysis skills by engaging them in the rhetorical analysis of mass media texts, including advertisements, commercials, and film and television clips (Appendices D, E, F), and to introduce them to social justice issues by engaging in a critique of the politics of representation, which relates to who is being represented, how they are being represented, who is being omitted, and what stereotypes are being reinforced and/or challenged (Kellner & Share, 2007a) (Appendix F). In a unit called Reading Mass Media, student-participants deconstructed and analyzed media texts, including print advertisements, television commercials, movie trailers, and reality television clips. Rhetorical analysis of these texts examined persuasive appeals, the importance of target audience, and issues related to patterns of stereotyping and representation.

As I began my inquiry into my Problem of Practice, which relates to improving curriculum and pedagogy to help student-participants develop rhetorical analysis skills, I engaged in a systematic reflection on my classroom practices, discovering that my practice was too lecture-driven and not student-centered enough. I was not providing my student-participants with educative experiences that helped them build upon their lived experience (Dewey, 1938; Ertmer & Newby, 2013), nor was I helping them develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2000). Thus, I engaged in self-reflective problem-solving to investigate what instructional intervention would help me accomplish these academic and pedagogical goals, designing this Unit as a result. This present action
research study was a systematic and collaborative inquiry, with participants working together to investigate the impact and effectiveness of the Unit.

**Ethical considerations**

The teacher-researcher adhered to the National Education Association’s (2015) Code of Ethics and the ethical standards of educational research as outlined by Mertler (2017), ensuring that the NEA’s combined commitment to the student and to the profession were upheld throughout the research process. Before the study began, the teacher-researcher obtained voluntary and informed consent for all participants, informing them of the nature of the study and of their rights (Appendix O). As the research site is a high school and the student-participants are minors, this included parental consent, student assent, and the right to withdraw consent at any time. Additionally, the teacher-researcher explained to parents and student-participants that their participation was completely voluntary; a decision not to participate would not affect the quality of instruction, the level of interaction, nor student grades. To ensure confidentiality, the teacher-researcher removed all personally-identifying information, using pseudonyms or coded identification for data recording, reporting, and analysis. The teacher-researcher also followed university and research-site guidelines for research approval. From a local perspective, the teacher-researcher remained cognizant of the interests and concerns of the conservative community in which she teaches, adapting the focus of the content as needed due to the political climate at the time of implementation. More specific to the nature of the instruction provided in the Unit, the teacher-researcher was also mindful about how personally meaningful media representation can be,
especially as related to the interaction of representation, pleasure, and the development of personal and social identity (Hobbs, 2007).

**Methodology**

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) argue that when teacher inquiry is used for professional development, it “simply makes the normal, everyday work of teaching less happenstance and more visible, heightening the opportunity for teachers to improve learning conditions in their classrooms on a regular basis” (p. 149). This present action research study was designed for me to implement the Unit and improve my curriculum and pedagogy in AP ELC. Student-participants engaged in CML and deconstructed advertisements, including magazine advertisements, television commercials, and movie trailers. This Unit provided my student-participants with opportunities to make sense of how these images function within their lived experience as consumers of mass media as well as young people growing up in the rural Lowcountry of South Carolina.

In addition to conducting classroom observations and keeping a reflective journal, I collected data related to student-participant perceptions through a post-instruction survey (Appendix N) and a focus-group interview (Appendix P). These data were then used to form an action plan that includes improving the Unit for future implementation with racially and economically diverse, rural, southern students as well as designing professional development sessions with other ELA teachers to improve AP ELC curriculum at LHS. This action plan is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

**Local Social Justice Considerations**

The research site for this study is economically diverse, and some student-participants come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Though the school district has
implemented a 1:1 technology initiative to democratize access to internet-ready electronic devices, some student-participants were hindered by a lack of internet access outside of school. This is an important consideration for this study for two reasons. First, student-participants from low socioeconomic backgrounds may have had limited access to online texts, which could affect their readiness to apply and develop new literacies (Leu, Forzani, & Kennedy, 2015; Leu et al., 2015). Second, student-participants may have limited access to internet-based technologies outside of school, which could affect their ability to work on media analysis and production activities after school hours. For these reasons, I prioritized print texts, such as magazine covers and advertisements, and allowed student-participants to use time in class for activities that would require an internet connection.

**Potential Weaknesses**

This present action research study is limited by several factors. Firstly, the study is limited by time, as the eight-week data collection period does not allow for the examination of continued development of skills or any long-term impacts of the Unit. Student-participants in AP ELC have not been exposed to critical media literacy instruction in the past at LHS because previous instruction reflects the banking method (Freire, 1970/2000) of instruction. Therefore, it may take extra time to enable the student-participants to learn text analysis techniques. A further weakness related to time comes from my role as both teacher and researcher. As a full-time teacher, the time required for data analysis and interpretation was relegated to after school, on weekends, and over breaks. In some instances, this created delays between data collection and data
analysis. Though I maintained and referred to my researcher’s journal throughout the inquiry process, some nuances may have been lost.

Secondly, the study is limited because it reflects the first cycle of action research conducted by a novice teacher-researcher. The pedagogical approach used in this Unit is new for me as a teacher, and the study and the Unit continue to be a work in progress. Relatedly, the instruments themselves are a work in progress. In addition to not piloting the pre- and post-instructional surveys prior to the study, during the study I found it necessary to make an adjustment from the pretest to the posttest because many student-participants did not understand one of the questions (see Appendix D). Though this may weaken the study, I wanted to ensure student-participants could fully demonstrate their understanding of the text under investigation. To maintain the fidelity of the data, results of this question on the pretest and posttest were analyzed as separate questions and were not compared in data analysis.

Finally, the study is limited due to the potential for bias. As the teacher-researcher, I have to balance my roles as both insider and outsider (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Though I have worked to be as objective as possible and to recognize my own biases by engaging in a reflexive practice, I recognize that I want my student-participants to be successful and I want my Unit to be effective, and that may influence my interpretation of the data. To help curb any potential biases, I engaged in a constant comparative method of data analysis while reading, rereading, coding, and polyangulating the data (Mertler, 2017; Saldaña, 2016).
Significance of the Study

By studying student perceptions and performance in the unit *Reading Mass Media*, this action research study helped me determine the effectiveness of the Unit, identifying what changes needed to be made to improve it for future use. Professionally, this AR study reflects a change in my own pedagogical theory and practice—my view of the demands of literacy in contemporary culture has changed substantially in recent years. In our media-saturated society, traditional models of literacy are no longer sufficient to prepare students to be literate adults. Through implementing critical media literacy instruction in AP ELC, I sought to improve my existing curriculum and pedagogy in order to improve my practice and better prepare my student-participants not only for the AP ELC exam, but also for active, informed, and critical citizenship. My student-participants will become adults in a consumerist culture where corporate media are “prone to send negative messages and reinforce stereotypes and dominant value systems that could have deleterious effects on uncritical consumers” (Morell et al., 2013, p. 2), and CML skills can help them navigate that media landscape. By having my student-participants deconstruct various forms of advertisements, including print advertisements, commercials, and movie trailers, I endeavored to help them see the constructed nature of all texts as well as the relevance of rhetorical analysis in their daily lives. Furthermore, CML challenges the traditional banking model of education by positioning students as more than mere “receptacles” or “containers” to be filled (Freire, 1970/2000); rather, in this Unit, student-participants are actively engaged, deconstructing media messages and constructing counter-narratives that combat stereotypes and misrepresentations. For example, in the culminating project, student-participants select an advertisement, write a
rhetorical analysis essay, and design a counter-advertisement responding to what they view as problematic representation (Appendix F).

Conclusion

As media continues to inform our daily lives in new and diverse ways, we as educators must endeavor to use meaningful and relevant materials and strategies to engage students and prepare them for their futures in the digital age. By expanding the concept of literacy to include new forms of media and media texts, my student-participants are encouraged to critically evaluate the barrage of media messages and are enabled to create social change for a more equitable and just society. Dewey (1938) advocated for a student-centered approach to education that prepares students with educative experiences that encourage present and future growth, and CML has the potential to fulfill that vision by having student-participants actively deconstruct media messages from popular culture and create their own responses through critical analyses and counter-narratives.

Chapter One of this Dissertation in Practice (DiP) introduced the reader to the concept and development of the field of critical media literacy; the researcher’s identified Problem of Practice (PoP), research question, and purpose statement; a review of scholarly literature grounding and informing this study; a summary of methodology for the proposed action research; and a discussion of both the weaknesses and the significance of the study.

This Dissertation in Practice (DiP) uses action research methods to evaluate the impact of the CML unit Reading Mass Media. In the following chapters, this DiP includes a review of literature; an overview of the action research methodology;
discussion of findings and implications; and a final summary with conclusions and an
action plan to help other educators who seek to implement CML instruction into their
own practice by sharing the successes and failures of the Unit.

Glossary of Key Terms

Critical literacy. Emerging from the philosophies of Paulo Freire (1970/2000;
Freire & Macedo, 1987), critical literacy is “the ability to read texts in an active,
reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human
relationships,” which “enables people to interpret messages in the modern world through
a critical lens and challenge the power relations within those messages” (Coffey, 2013,
para. 1-2).

Critical media literacy. An extension of media literacy that incorporates cultural
studies and critical pedagogy, asking readers to “critically analyze relationships between
media and audiences, information and power” (Kellner & Share, 2007b, p. 59) and
“making young people aware of the role that media play, both positively and
problematically, in shaping social thought” (Morrell et al., 2013, p. 3).

Critical pedagogy or Critical theory. Inspired by the philosophies of Paulo Freire
(1970/2000) and John Dewey (1938), critical pedagogy involves active, authentic,
participatory, and empowering learning that “builds upon community cultural wealth and
students’ intrinsic desire to enact social change to create learning spaces that are rigorous,
relevant, participatory, authentic, and engaging of content—and of the social world”
(Morrel, Dueñas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013, p. 16).

Critical thinking. Thinking that includes the hierarchical skills of Bloom’s
taxonomy: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create (Scheibe &
Rogow, 2012, p. 22). Additionally, “strong-sense” critical thinking requires thinkers to critically question and evaluate topics and texts while also being aware of their own biases and perspectives (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012, p. 23).

**Cultural studies.** An interdisciplinary field that “investigates the ways in which ‘culture’ creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, social relations and power” (Cultural Studies @ UNC, 2016, para. 1).

**Literacy.** The ability to read, interpret, and write, typically associated with books, articles, essays, and other traditional print texts (Kellner & Share, 2005).

**Mass media.** Communication with large audiences through the use of various technologies, including “film, newspapers, TV shows, magazines, radio, popular music, video games, and the Internet” (Hobbs, 2007, p. 84).

**Media literacy.** An extension of literacy that includes reading and interpreting information obtained from various forms of media (news, advertisements, film, websites, etc.). Defined as “an ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms” (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012, p. 19).

**Media representation or Politics of representation.** An examination of how people are represented in media messages (who is being represented, how they are being represented, who or what is being omitted, what stereotypes are being reinforced or challenged, etc.) (Common Sense Media, 2016, 2017; Gainer, 2010; Kellner & Share, 2005; Kellner & Share, 2007b).

**Popular culture.** Products that reflect the interests and tastes of the masses in a given culture at a given time, including advertisements, films, television shows, magazines, fashion, etc. (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).
**Rhetorical analysis.** Rhetoric is often described as the art of argument; rhetorical analysis is the process of analyzing how the strategies used by the creator of a nonfiction text (written or visual) achieve a particular purpose or effect (Texas A&M, 2016).

**Rhetorical triangle.** A model used in rhetorical analysis that includes three main points of analysis: (1) ethos/writer, which refers to how the author establishes credibility for himself and his argument; (2) pathos/audience, which refers to how the author appeals to the audience’s beliefs, values, and emotions; and (3) logos/argument, which refers to the “text” of the argument and how the author appeals to logic and reason through the argument itself (Lutzke & Henggeler, 2009).

**Student engagement.** Engagement refers to active participation in learning (Goldspink & Foster, 2013). Student attention and interest in instructional activities or materials, marked by presence of on-task behavior (working attentively on the assignment, actively listening, viewing, or working) and lack of off-task behavior (distractions, side conversations, zoning out, etc.).

**Visual literacy.** An extension of literacy that includes reading and interpreting information obtained from images (infographics, advertisements, pictures, films, etc.) by examining how image and context create meaning (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012, p. 29).
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Two is to describe the literature that frames the present study of a critical media literacy unit on a group of rural, Southern high school student-participants in an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition course (AP ELC). The present study is guided by the following research question: *What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?* Literature that enables the teacher-researcher to prepare a curriculum and improve her pedagogy in the area of critical media literacy is the basis of Chapter Two.

One of the central skills in AP ELC is rhetorical analysis, a technique that involves critically analyzing print and non-print texts for their rhetorical, as opposed to aesthetic, function (College Board, 2014). At Lowcountry High School (LHS) (pseudonym), some student-participants enter the AP ELC class without a clear understanding of how to do rhetorical analysis, a core skill tested on the end-of-course exam. As the teacher-researcher, I conducted a thorough review of existing curriculum and pedagogy, and the development of media literacy skills was poorly represented in the existing curriculum. In an effort to create another access point for the difficult skill of rhetorical analysis, I designed a unit that combines rhetorical analysis and critical media literacy, called *Reading Mass Media*. In the Unit, student-participants engage in meta-
learning about media (Mears, 2010) and rhetorically analyze a variety of media texts, including advertisements and commercials. I selected this particular intervention because media literacy instruction challenges the “banking” model of education (Freire, 1970/2000) and has been shown to improve academic achievement, including reading comprehension and critical analysis skills (Hobbs, 2007). The Unit was taught early in the school year as a high-interest introduction to these essential rhetorical analysis skills. Though I have utilized different strategies in the past to try to increase my student-participants’ engagement with the process of rhetorical analysis, I have never done a systematic study of the effects of any of these interventions in my classroom before; the present study is the first formalized action research (AR) study to improve my pedagogy in AP ELC.

This review of literature was conducted using a variety of databases available through the University of South Carolina Thomas Cooper Library, Google Scholar, and professional literature on critical literacy, media literacy, and critical media literacy. This chapter provides a conceptual framework for the study, an argument for expanding the notion of literacy, an examination of the various approaches to media education, a description of critical media literacy instruction and its implementation in the Unit under investigation in this AR study, and a review of existing research on media literacy and critical media literacy interventions.

**Purpose of the Review**

The purpose of a literature review is to present a logical and well-researched case for the study that reflects relevant and current knowledge of the published scholarship (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Current research is vital, as it allows the review of literature
to accurately convey what is presently known and unknown about the topic and may provide valuable information regarding how to most effectively implement the intervention. The literature review prioritizes primary sources, including empirical research and foundational literature, and includes a discussion of the theoretical and historical contexts of the topic (Mertler, 2017). In action research, the review of literature is important in multiple stages of the multi-step, iterative process, including developing an understanding of the topic, defining and narrowing the topic, developing the research design, and selecting appropriate instruments for measurement (Mertler, 2017).

Machi and McEvoy (2016) describe the literature review as a highly sophisticated critical-thinking process. Through engaging in this complex and rigorous intellectual task, this literature review demonstrates an informed understanding of the body of research regarding the proposed intervention: the implementation of critical media literacy instruction. The materials selected for this literature review reflect both foundational and current scholarship on critical media literacy, particularly as related to student engagement and skills related to rhetorical analysis. The foundational literature has been reviewed to provide an understanding of the nature of critical media literacy and its theoretical grounding, and the empirical research has been reviewed to examine what can be learned by the interventional approaches that have been conducted by other researchers. This literature review seeks to justify the choice of this particular intervention (a critical media literacy unit) to address the locally identified Problem of Practice (improving my curriculum and pedagogy to better support the development of skills related to rhetorical analysis in AP ELC).
Conceptual Framework

The Unit implemented in this action research study uses critical media literacy instruction to engage student-participants in the rhetorical analysis of popular culture texts. This section discusses the conceptual framework that guides the design of the Unit.

Theoretical Foundation


Progressivism. The theories of John Dewey, one of the most influential philosophers of progressivism, inform the framing of the Unit used in this study. In his seminal work Experience and Education, Dewey (1938) strongly criticizes traditional models of education that replicate static bodies of knowledge, accusing such practices of “impos[ing] adult standards, subject matter, and methods” upon learners (pp. 18-19). In place of these imposing practices, Dewey (1938) encourages a deeply democratic approach to education that values expression, individuality, and educative learning experiences. Dewey (1916) believed strongly in the social function of schools, and he argued that democracy depends on education that prepares students for political participation. Through this frame, media literacy education is particularly valuable due to its capacity to encourage active citizenship (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Hobbs, 2007; Hobbs & Martens, 2015; Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem, & Moen, 2013; Thevenin & Mihailidis, 2012). Furthermore, Dewey
(1956/2010) argued that a school can be “a miniature community, an embryonic society” (p. 11), an implication that underscores the relevance of real-world texts with social significance, as used in the Unit in this present study.

This Unit represents a shift in my pedagogical approach from a more traditional to a more progressive style of teaching. Unfortunately, the pressure for obtaining high test scores in AP ELC has encouraged learning that is little more than the “acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill” (Dewey, 1916, p. 19). In line with Deweyan philosophy, I am shifting my pedagogical approach from one of direction and control to one of guidance and facilitation of learning. As Dewey (1938) tells us, learning and experience are inextricably linked, and all educational experiences can thus be categorized as either educative (encouraging present or future growth) or mis-educative (distorting or arresting future growth) (p. 25). Through the use of critical media literacy and student-centered, inquiry-based instruction, I endeavor to provide student-participants with educative experiences that engage them in the learning process and promote continued growth and positive future experiences.

Critical Theory. Many approaches to media literacy, including critical media literacy, are grounded in Freirean critical theory (Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2005; Morrell et al., 2013; Thevenin & Mihailidis, 2012). Like Deweyan progressivism, critical pedagogy runs counter to traditional models of teaching and education.

Banking model. Freire (1970/2000) was extremely critical of what he described as the “banking” model of education. According to this view, traditional educational methods often reinforce the status quo by maintaining strict adherence to established
In these traditional classrooms, the learners are quietly sitting in rows, passively accepting information as knowledge, like empty receptacles waiting to be filled.

Banking methods have made a resurgence in the decades since A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind. A back-to-basics movement that embodies a more Essentialist (Bagley, 1938) approach to education has ushered in a growing emphasis on high-stakes, standardized tests; mandated curriculum standards; and accountability (Hayes, 2006). The educational reform that has followed has effectively narrowed the curriculum and placed an emphasis on basic skills, with many teachers finding themselves teaching to the test—often through the use of banking methods—rather than employing creative instruction and authentic learning (Erskine, 2014). Such back-to-basics approaches conjure images of orderly classrooms with the teacher lecturing from the front of the room or coaching students through drill-and-kill exercises that encourage factual recall and discourage lifelong learning (Slater, 2005). Evoking Freirean (1970/2000) notions of banking, the learners are quietly sitting in rows, passively accepting information as knowledge, like empty receptacles waiting to be filled.

The passive acceptance of information at face value has become problematic in a twenty-first century context, where the vast media landscape has made it incredibly easy for people to find and share information online; unfortunately, the easy access to factually-based *information* is accompanied by access to unintentionally inaccurate *misinformation* and intentionally deceptive *disinformation* (Karlova & Fisher, 2013).

The ease at which misinformation and disinformation is uncritically accepted and quickly shared is something I find troubling, and recent years have brought an awareness of the urgent need for media literacy education to help students become critical
Notably, the Stanford History Education Group (2016) recently published a study examining the civic online reasoning abilities of students from middle school to college, and in the Executive Summary, the authors described their findings with one word: bleak (p. 4). At all levels, students were easily deceived by information shared on social media. This national tendency has been observed in the teacher-researcher’s classroom as well, with students incorporating content from untrustworthy sources into academic assignments and conversations with their peers. Though we now have more information at our fingertips than at any other time in history, “[w]hether this bounty will make us smarter and better informed or more ignorant and narrow-minded will depend on our awareness of this problem and our educational response to it” (SHEG, 2016, p. 5).

This Unit and the teacher-researcher’s ongoing efforts to incorporate critical media literacy instruction into her practice reflect an educational response to the SHEG (2016) findings and her own observations. By problematizing the ways in which the uncritical consumption of media texts can inform and distort our perceptions of the world and the people within it, the Unit in this present AR study is intended to combat banking tendencies within and beyond the classroom by helping student-participants develop the skills needed to critically interrogate media texts.

**Critical literacy.** Originally framed by Freire (1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987), critical literacy elevates the concept of literacy beyond an objective, technical skill to be developed to include what Freire described as “reading the word and the world,” thus enabling literacy to move beyond the constructed text to involve a “reading” of one’s culture and society. According to Giroux (1987), Freire’s vision of literacy empowers
individuals by using pedagogical skills and critical analysis to “examin[e] how cultural
definitions of gender, race, class, and subjectivity are constituted as both historical and
social constructs” (p. 6). By exploring issues of power, inequality, and injustice, critical
literacy encourages students to engage in a reflective literacy practice that explores
complex and significant social issues (Coffey, 2013), such as those examined in AP ELC.

Researchers and scholars have offered various ways to accomplish the objectives
of critical literacy education. For example, Petrone and Gibney (2005) had students
critically examine various types of texts—from dollar bills to works of literature—and
reflect on their observations and assumptions, also considering what has been omitted
from those texts; this praxis encourages students to question their assumptions, to “see
those cultural and social ‘objects’ that appeared to be natural, fixed, and impenetrable as
products of historical, socially constructed process from which certain people benefitted
by having them be the way they are” (p. 36). In another study, Phelps (2010)
investigated the potential of using critical readings of texts to challenge harmful
stereotypes and prejudices, offering generic critical literacy questions that teachers can
adapt and apply to their own practice. Similar to the Center for Media Literacy’s (2018)
Core Questions, which guide the analysis in the Unit used in this present AR study,
Phelps’s (2010) questions include an investigation of author’s purpose, reader
positionality, and issues of representation and omission (p. 194).

If we are to help our students “read the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo,
1987), we must engage them in critical literacy practices that align with the expectations
and demands for literate adults in the digital age. Citizens in today’s world consume
media from a variety of sources, including traditional media, such as newspapers,
magazines, and broadcast television, as well as new media, such as websites, digital video, and social media. Though digital forms of media provide greater access to information, they also provide greater access to misinformation (Chen, Sin, Theng, & Lee, 2015; Romero-Rodríguez, de-Casas-Moreno, & Torres-Toukoumidis, 2016; Shin, Jian, Driscoll, & Bar, 2018). Thus, if students are to be truly literate in our shifting media landscape, they must be able to critically evaluate the various forms of media messaging. To accomplish this, we must acknowledge the challenges of contemporary media culture and implement strategies that engage and support multiple forms of literacy that reflect these new and changing forms of media (Kellner, 1998, 2004). The critical media literacy instruction used in the Unit in this present AR study was designed with these goals and ideals in mind.

**Constructivism.** Constructivism is a learning theory that emerged in the early twentieth century and is strongly influenced by Piaget’s cognitive schema theory, Dewey’s views on the educative value of experience, and Montessori’s perspective on student-centered education (Ultanir, 2012). Constructivist approaches to education—particularly social and critical constructivism—encourage active, student-centered learning that recognizes the constructed nature of knowledge and encourages the development of critical consciousness (Fleury & Garrison, 2014; Freire, 1970/2000). According to constructivist thought, individuals make meaning by actively constructing knowledge through personal interaction with the environment, with each new experience interpreted in the context of the experience itself as well as all preceding knowledge and events (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).
Social and critical constructivism. Though constructivism has gained traction in recent decades, becoming the dominant learning theory, it has also evolved to include social constructivism (Adams, 2006; Ertmer & Newby, 2013) and critical constructivism (Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2005; Fleury & Garrison, 2007; Kincheloe, 2005).

Social constructivism. Social constructivism (SC) builds from earlier notions of constructivism by recognizing and valuing both the personal and social aspects of learning (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). By positioning learning as inherently connected to the learner’s social context and considering the interpersonal nature of such contexts, SC views all learners in a process of negotiating multiple perspectives in their meaning-making (Adams, 2006).

Critical constructivism. In recent years, SC has further evolved into critical constructivism (CC), which incorporates an investigation of the social construction of the individual identity of each knower (Fleury & Garrison, 2007). In addition to recognizing the influence of social contexts on knowers and their construction of knowledge, CC also incorporates recognition of cultural and political influences (Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2005), thereby encouraging educators to acknowledge the situatedness of each learner and the fundamentally subjective nature of knowledge itself (Kincheloe, 2005). Like Freirean (1970/2000) critical pedagogy, CC challenges banking methods of education that view knowledge as something to be “deposited” into students while also examining hierarchical relationships of power and marginalization as related to knowledge acquisition, development, and validation (Kincheloe, 2005).

Constructivism, in all its iterations, also runs counter to behaviorist approaches to education that fail to account for the cognitive processes associated with learning and fail
to recognize that most learning takes place in the mind and is thus not directly observable (Adams, 2006). The emphasis on testing embodied by the back-to-basics movement, which relies on how a student performs on a given test, shortchanges students in two ways: First, teaching to the test necessarily limits students’ learning opportunities to those particular skills and concepts that will be tested; and second, outcome-based approaches that focus on a simplified understanding of the relationship between learning and performance may not accurately represent the student’s learning (Adams, 2006). For these reasons, constructivist approaches, such as those implemented in the Unit, hold potential for challenging and overcoming the banking model of education.

**Constructivism and literacy.** In the context of literacy and ELA, constructivism is extremely valuable. Sociocultural theories of literacy emphasize the social and cultural value of various literacy practices (Perry, 2012). In order to engage in these practices, students must not only develop literacy skills, but they must also develop an understanding of the various social contexts in which complex literacy tasks are executed (Deane, et al., 2015). Thus, literacy involves navigating a series of *activity systems*, which are “established pattern[s] of social interactions, or practices, in which particular skills, tools, and forms of knowledge are critical for full participation” (Deane et al., 2015, p. 3). For example, reading novels and reading social media posts represent two very different activity systems of literacy, each engaging in different patterns and practices, and each requiring a different set of skills, tools, and knowledge. Full participation in the digital age requires an understanding of how people interact with various forms of media and how media functions as a system within a meaningful social
practice, and critical media literacy (CML) instruction, such as that provided in the Unit used in this present study, can help fill that void.

**Constructivism and CML.** Critically examining the sources from which knowers construct their understanding of the world and the people within it is particularly important in the digital era, where various forms of media—including those that distribute misinformation and disinformation (Karlova & Fisher, 2013)—influence knowledge constructed in personal, social, cultural, and political spaces (Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2005). CML instruction provides an ideal context for constructivist learning because it engages student-participants in generative learning in authentic contexts, using media technologies to support active constructivist learning as opposed to passive, unengaging drill-and-practice approaches used in so many classrooms (Mears, 2010).

Through CML, student-participants engage in meta-learning with and about media (Mears, 2010): They critically analyze how media texts are constructed; they engage in critical dialogue regarding issues related to gender, race, class, and power; and they develop their own media texts, including counter-narratives (Kellner & Share, 2007b). With these activities, CML encourages student-participants to actively construct an understanding of culture, social issues, identity, and how various forms of media function by using authentic tasks and meaningful contexts, which Ertmer and Newby (2013) identify as essential components of understanding in a constructivist context.

**Rhetorical Theory.** The form of critical text analysis utilized in this study relates to Aristotelian rhetoric, which dates back to Aristotle’s famous 4th century BC treatise, *Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 2012; Aristotle & Kennedy, 1991/2006; Rapp, 2010). Often described as *the art of persuasion or the art of argument*, Aristotle (2012) defined
rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Chapter 2, para. 1). The AP ELC Course Guide defines rhetorical analysis (RA) as a skill that “requires students to attend to the pragmatic and stylistic choices writers make to achieve their purposes with particular audiences, or the effects these choices might have on multiple, even unintended audiences” (College Board, 2014, pp. 28-19).

More specifically, rhetoric involves the stylistic choices made by rhetors (writers/speakers) in attempts to persuade or convince audiences. This includes Aristotle’s three means of persuasion: ethos (character; credibility; ethical appeals), pathos (the audience’s emotional dispositions; emotional appeals), and logos (the form of the argument itself; logical appeals) (Rapp, 2010). Rhetoric also involves a consideration of how the rhetorical situation—which includes author, audience, purpose, subject, and social and historical contexts—shapes the delivery of the message (CB, 2014; Roskelly, 2006). The rhetorical situation is often presented to students through the visual depiction of the rhetorical triangle (CB, 2014). Originally created by Kinneavy (1980), the rhetorical triangle emphasizes the relationships among the key components of author, audience, message, and context, and considers how these components shape the text.

**Rhetoric and media.** The elements of rhetoric can also be effectively applied to the analysis of media and popular culture texts (Falter, 2013; Hobbs, 2017). In fact, the College Board (2014) affirms that in AP ELC, “students should learn to analyze and evaluate the rhetorical use of images, graphics, video, film, and design components of print- and Web-based texts” (p. 27). This is often done through the rhetorical analysis of advertisements, which are inherently persuasive in nature (Labrador, Ramón, Alaiz-Moretón, & Sanjurjo-González, 2014; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; Van Mulken, 2003).
However, holding to Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, and Walters’s (2012) view that *everything* is an argument and can thus be analyzed rhetorically, various forms of visual media can be analyzed for visual rhetoric. This also falls in line with College Board’s views on what AP ELC students need to know about rhetoric: In a special focus piece featured on the College Board website, AP teacher Roskelly (2006) asserts that “The first thing that students need to know about rhetoric, then, is that it’s all around us in conversation, in movies, in advertisements and books, in body language, and in art” (p. 7).

**Expanding the Notion of Literacy**

Technological advances and new forms of media have brought many changes to the nature of literacy in contemporary American society, causing leading critical media literacy theorists Douglass Kellner and Jeff Share (2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009) to argue for an expansion of the notion of literacy. Literacy, according to their view, relates to “gaining competencies involved in effectively learning and using socially constructed forms of communication and representation” (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 369).

Traditional literacy, the reading and writing of print materials, no longer represents the full range of competencies that literate citizens are expected to perform (Kellner, 1998). Furthermore, the development of new technologies and new forms of media means that today’s citizens consume more media more quickly than previous generations, and today’s students have new literacy demands due to the availability of these new technologies (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009; Simsek & Simsek, 2013). This technological revolution “poses tremendous challenges to education to rethink its basic tenets, to deploy the new technologies in creative and productive ways, and to restructure schooling in the light of the metamorphosis we are now undergoing” (Kellner, 1998).
Thus, if my AP ELC student-participants are to become critical consumers of the barrage of information brought by the technological revolution, my literacy instruction must be critical in nature, and it must reflect these vast technological changes (Kellner, 1998, 2004; Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007b).

**Embracing Multiple Literacies**

The prevalence of digital technologies has led to the development of multiple forms of literacy, including informational literacy, visual literacy, computer or digital literacy, media literacy, and multimedia literacy (Kellner, 1998, 2004; Kellner & Share, 2005; Considine et al., 2009). Drawing from their experiences living in a rich media environment, my student-participants enter my classroom with “a rich and different set of literacy practices and background that is often unacknowledged or underused by educators” (Considine et al., 2009, p. 471). However, having the practices, background, and experiences does not mean that my student-participants are truly literate. Though they are so-called digital natives (Prensky, 2001) who interact with various forms of media on a regular basis, that does not mean they have actually developed competency with these new literacies; rather, the widespread use of various technologies “often creates a false [emphasis added] sense of competency, as well as the misperception among many adults that contemporary youth are ‘media savvy’” (Considine et al., 2009; p. 472). If I am going to help my AP ELC student-participants develop these competencies, these new and multiple literacies must be incorporated into my curriculum. The Unit helps me accomplish this goal by engaging student-participants in the analysis of visual and multimodal texts, including advertisements, commercials, and film and television clips, as well as the creation of media texts of their own.
Supporting traditional literacy. Incorporating new and multiple literacies does not negate the need to teach traditional literacy; in fact, with the constant flow of information young people access through the internet and social media, traditional literacy is more important than ever. Kellner and Share (2005) argue that in this age of digital-media saturation, traditional literacy remains essential because “people need to critically scrutinize and scroll tremendous amounts of information” (p. 370). Teaching students to be literate in a twenty-first century context necessarily involves both new and traditional forms of literacy.

Bringing real-world media texts into the classroom not only makes learning more relevant by establishing “authentic practices connected to broader social and cultural practices” (Larson & Marsh, 2015, p. 20); it also reinforces traditional literacy skills (Hobbs, 2007; Tan & Guo, 2009; Young & Daunic, 2012). This is particularly important because standardized testing, including the AP ELC exam, still prioritizes traditional literacy. For example, a recent qualitative study found that media literacy can support several traditional literacy skills that are central to AP ELC, including evaluating argument, understanding perspective, targeting a specific audience, and using the writing process (Young & Daunic, 2012). Young and Daunic’s study also provided evidence that media literacy instruction can increase student motivation, engagement, and interest in literacy practices in and outside of school.

Literacy practices of today’s youth. Concerns about illiteracy as well as aliteracy, which describes people who have the ability to read but choose not to, have been circulating through society throughout the digital age (Agee, 2005; Beers, 1996; Decker, 1986; Dredger, 2013; Kidder, 1985; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008).
The standards movement, which was supposed to improve the quality of American education, has failed in the eyes of many. Stedman (2010) reports that in the last 25 years, achievement has plateaued, dropout numbers have increased, aliteracy has increased, and achievement gaps have endured. There is no denying that schools are filled with struggling and reluctant readers; however, research suggests that non-traditional texts, such as multimedia and popular culture texts, can support students’ developing literacy by providing an increase in access, interest, and motivation (Bell, 2017; Fingon, 2012; Gunter & Kenny, 2008). In my Unit, the notion of literacy is expanded, and student-participants are encouraged to apply critical reading skills to visual texts; it is my hope that this will help encourage student-participants to critically read all media they consume, including visual modes such as mass media and popular culture texts.

Literacy, both new and traditional forms, still has value in society and in students’ individual lives. Though technological advancements have ushered in new media and new ways of consuming them, the same literacy principles apply in our endeavors to teach students how to read the media texts they see every day in and outside of school. The ways in which texts are shared and accessed and the ways in which literacy is performed may have changed, but the value of literacy has not diminished. Our task is to change how we prepare our students for lives as literate adults, which means we must teach skills that apply to both traditional and new literacies.

The Need for Media Education

Americans are inundated by media. According to Nielson’s (2016) Total Audience Report, American adults are now consuming an average of 10 hours and 39
minutes of media per day—an increase of one full hour from the previous year—with media coming from a variety of devices, including tablets, smartphones, computers and other multimedia devices, video games, film and video, radio, and television (live and recorded) (p. 4). Common Sense Media (CSM) (2015) recently conducted a large-scale study of 2,600 young people’s media habits. Their study found that teens aged 13-18 consume an average of approximately nine hours of entertainment media per day—not including time spent on school or homework (p. 15).

Though watching television and listening to music appear to be high priorities for teens’ media consumption (p. 18), the amount of time teens spend on various forms of social media is also increasing, with teens spending more than an hour daily on social media on average (p. 21). This increase in media consumption is concerning for students’ development, emotionally and academically. For example, a study by Lin et al. (2016) found that young adults who spend more time on social media experience higher rates of depression. On the academic front, Giunchiglia, Zeni, Gobbi, Bignotti, and Bison (2018) conducted a study analyzing the relationship between mobile social media usage and academic performance, and their findings suggest that the addictive nature of social media has the potential to negatively impact students’ academic achievement. As these studies suggest, media culture is a significant part of young people’s lives as students and citizens in the digital age; thus, their education needs to prepare them to critically evaluate these media messages so they can manage this inundation of information in a healthy way, and AP ELC provides an excellent context for this learning to take place.
**Defining media.** The concept of “media” is vast; while some may associate the term *media* with film or news media, the concept of media as related to *media education*, including media literacy, is much more expansive and inclusive (Baker, 2016; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012; Silverblatt, 2008). As one of the founders of our modern conception of media education, Buckingham (2003) defines media as “the whole range of modern communications media” (p. 3), which now includes traditional outlets such as television, film, radio, photography, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, literature, and recorded music, as well as newer outlets such as the internet, computer and mobile device games and applications, and various forms of social media. As such, *media texts* refer to all audio, visual, and textual content transmitted through these various forms of communications media. *Media literacy*, therefore, applies the concepts of literacy to these expanding forms of media texts, aiming to “develop *both* critical understanding and *active participation*” by teaching students *about*, as opposed to *through* or *with*, the media (Buckingham, 2003, p. 4). In the Unit, student-participants engage in meta-learning with and about media (Mears, 2010) through the critical analysis of media texts, including advertisements, commercials, and film and television clips, as well as the creation of their own media texts using digital technologies.

**Media as a public pedagogy.** Modern media are a powerful socializing force. Buckingham (2003) argued that the media are a significant means of cultural expression and communication; to “become an active participant in public life necessarily involves making use of the modern media” (p. 5)—a reality that has only been exacerbated in recent years with the rise of social media. Kellner and Share (2007a) go so far as to describe media as a *public pedagogy* due to their influential role in “organizing, shaping,
and disseminating information, ideas, and values” (p. 3). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the persuasive power of our commercialized media environment, in which advertisements are becoming more integrated into all forms of media content through the use of branded websites as well as brand and product placement in television, film, video games, and social media (Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010). One research study found that, though adolescents appeared to be more aware of product placement than adults, they were still unaware of the persuasive power of such advertisements, lacking the critical faculties to mitigate their use (Van Reijmersdal, Boerman, Buijzen, & Rozendaal, 2017). For this reason, the Unit includes the critical analysis of various forms of advertisements, including print advertisements, commercials, and movie trailers. In addition to the obvious relevance to AP ELC due to the use of persuasion, these texts were selected with the intent of preparing my student-participants for their current and future lives in an increasingly commercialized media environment.

**Historical Overview of Media Education**

Media education, though not as common in the United States as in many other nations, has taken several forms. We can classify these into four categories: the protectionist approach, media arts education, the media literacy movement, and critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Though the protectionist approach and media arts education are discussed briefly for context and contrast, media literacy and critical media literacy are discussed more thoroughly because they provide the framework for the Unit designed for this action research study.

**Protectionist approach.** The protectionist approach seeks to inoculate people against the persuasive powers of media, viewing audiences as passive consumers, or even
victims, which Kellner and Share (2007a) are critical of due to its anti-media bias and the tendency for “many activists on both sides of the political spectrum [to] come to media education as a way to push their agenda through blaming the media” (p. 60).

**Media arts education.** By contrast, media arts education focuses on the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of media and the arts, an approach that favors expression over criticism or analysis, “tend[ing] to unproblematically teach students the technical skills to merely reproduce hegemonic representations with little awareness of ideological implications or any type of social critique” (Kellner & Share, 2007a, p. 61). As these criticisms suggest, media literacy, and especially critical media literacy, take a more critical approach to media education, viewing the audience in a more active role and promoting both awareness and appreciation.

**Media literacy.** The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2008) views media literacy as an extension of literacy that includes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in various forms. Demonstrating their dedication to incorporating media literacy into language arts education, NCTE (2016) published a Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Media Literacy Education. In this document, NCTE (2008) differentiates between using media in instruction and engaging in media literacy instruction, identifying several understandings and attitudes that teachers and learners should adopt in their study of media texts:

- All media messages are constructed.
- Each medium has different characteristics and strengths and a unique language of construction.
- Media messages are produced for particular purposes.
• All media messages contain embedded values and points of view.
• People use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.
• Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process. (para. 11)

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) (2017), a leading national organization that began its media literacy advocacy in 1997 as the Partnership for Media Education, has provided its own description of media literacy, which expresses very similar beliefs. NAMLE (2017) defines media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication” (para. 1). According to their conception, media literacy extends traditional literacy by incorporating new forms of reading and writing into literacy instruction, which “empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens” (para. 1).

Though the media literacy movement has gained ground over the past decades, some academics argue that it does not accomplish enough in relation to the democratic ideals of education (Ferguson, 1998; Kellner & Share 2005, 2007a, 2007b). To illustrate this point, let us consider Robert Ferguson’s (1998) iceberg metaphor, where he compares media analysis to an iceberg where “[t]he vast bulk which is not immediately visible is the intellectual, historical and analytical base without which media analysis runs the risk of becoming superficial, mechanical or glib” (Ferguson, 1998, p. 2). According to this view, non-critical media analysis, such as that associated with the media literacy
movement, only analyzes the tip of the iceberg and, thus, shortchanges students (Kellner & Share, 2007b).

**Critical media literacy.** Critical media literacy (CML) includes elements of the three previous approaches to media education while also incorporating aspects of cultural studies and critical pedagogy through the influences of critical theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970/2000) and Henry Giroux (1994), media and cultural studies scholars such as Douglas Kellner (1995), and digital and media literacy scholars such as Renee Hobbs (2007, 2011). CML pioneers and advocates Douglas Kellner & Jeff Share (2007b) describe this form of media education as a “multiperspectival approach addressing issues of gender, race, class and power” that “deepens the potential of literacy education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power” (p. 56). Critical media pedagogy advocates Morrell et al. (2013) emphasize that learning must not be passive for students; rather, learning must be active, authentic, participatory, and empowering.

Grounded in the democratic approaches of progressive educators such as John Dewey (1916, 1938) and Paulo Freire (1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987), CML promotes active learning, problem solving, problem-posing, and collaborative learning among students and teachers (Kellner & Share, 2007a, p. 16). The conception of CML has been most strongly advocated by Douglass Kellner and Jeff Share (2005), who position CML instruction in both academic and social contexts in the way it “teaches students to learn from media, to resist media manipulation, and to use media materials in constructive ways” while simultaneously “developing skills that will help create good
citizens and that will make individuals more motivated and competent participants in social life” (p. 372).

**Components of CML Instruction**

CML instruction involves analyzing media texts as cultural artifacts, including investigating the politics of representation; producing alternative, counter-hegemonic media; and “expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure” (Kellner & Share, 2007b, p. 62). CML explores how language and other forms of communication are defined by relationships of power and domination, particularly as related to the “deeply embedded ideological notions of white supremacy, capitalist patriarchy, classism, homophobia, and other oppressive myths” (Kellner & Share, 2007b, p. 62). By positioning the audience in a more active role than some forms of media education, this exploration allows students to examine how ideology, power, and domination affect the relationship between power and information (Kellner & Share, 2007b).

**Media Analysis and Production**

Consistent with Kellner and Share’s (2007c) framing of CML, the CML instruction used in the Unit involves both the analysis of media texts and the production of alternative media texts.

**Media analysis.** Throughout the Unit, student-participants analyze a variety of media texts, including advertisements, commercials, and film and television clips. In addition to skills of deconstruction (Baker, 2016), this also includes an introduction to issues of representation in various media texts (Baker, 2016; Hobbs, 2007), including an examination of who is represented, how they are represented, and who is omitted.
(Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Hobbs, 2007). It is important to evaluate issues of representation because, as Ferguson (1998) argues, media representations are extremely powerful, perhaps even dangerous, due to their ability to be “interpreted as the only ‘reality’ that there is”—especially if that representation denies or contradicts material reality and individuals’ lived experiences (p. 4). Though “[m]edia representations extend our perceptions of reality, giving us symbolic access to people, ideas, and information that are beyond the limitations of our direct real-world experience” (Hobbs, 2007, p. 75), instruction in the Unit emphasizes that all media texts are constructed (Hobbs, 2007; TCML, 2018), and representations are mere “re-presentations” of reality (p. 74). The experiences these texts provide is necessarily restricted due to the choices authors make when constructing their texts, particularly as related to selection, emphasis, and omission (pp. 74-5). In addition to echoing Ferguson’s (1998) concerns described above, this also aligns with Buckingham’s (2003) view of representation:

> The media do not offer a transparent window on the world. They provide channels through which representations and images of the world can be communicated indirectly. The media intervene: they provide us with selective versions of the world, rather than direct access to it. (p. 3)

By problematizing representation, the Unit allows me to engage student-participants in the critical analysis of media texts with real-world relevance and significance (Kellner & Share, 2009).

**Alternative media production.** Another essential component for CML instruction is the development of counternarratives or other forms of critical media
production (Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Morrell, 2007; Morrell et al., 2013). By responding to media texts through the production of media texts, student-participants are able to challenge hegemonic media messages—an act that promotes active civic participation in a democratic society (Kellner & Share, 2007c; Ranieri & Fabbro, 2016). According to Morrell et al. (2013), the production of critical media can be a tool for resistance and an act of counter-hegemony in the way it allows student-participants to challenge existing politics of representation.

Research also supports the inclusion of media production (Banerjee & Kubey, 2013; Morrell, 2007; Ranieri & Fabbro, 2016). Critical literacy is a pedagogy of access and dissent, whereby media production becomes a way in which student-participants engage in political action for social change (Morell, 2007). To this end, meta-analyses by Ranier and Fabbro (2016) and Banerjee and Kubey (2013) demonstrate the effectiveness of media production in CML instruction, particularly as related to responding to the politics of representation. Ranieri and Fabbro’s (2016) suggest that (1) media production activities encourage student participation in the curriculum, and (2) a combination of critical analysis and media production is particularly effective in the development of students’ critical understanding of the relationship between media and society, information and power. Banerjee and Kubey’s (2013) meta-analysis of the literature demonstrated that having students engage in media production activities has a greater effect on attitudinal changes and perceptions than analysis-only curricula. As such, the Unit used in this action research study incorporates both critical analysis and the development of counternarrative.
In addition to media analysis, the Unit also has student-participants create alternative media texts and counternarratives. For example, in the culminating project (Appendix F), student-participants select an advertisement, write a rhetorical analysis essay, and create a counter-advertisement as a type of counternarrative (Kellner & Share, 2007c). In this counter-advertisement, student-participants create a new advertisement that challenges what they see as problematic representation, which can relate to the product or service that is being advertised, who is being used to advertise it, or a combination of both. This process is supported by Lowien (2016), who posits that literacy teachers can effectively scaffold skills and techniques by utilizing both deconstruction of existing texts and construction of student texts that use similar design features.

**Critical Questions**

CML instruction featured in the Unit is collaborative and inquiry-based (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). Many theorists and practitioners frame their analysis around a set of questions, which engages the Freirean (1970/2000) concept of problem-posing education. Problematizing these texts and the contexts in which they exist engages student-participants in course content through an examination of how historical systems of oppression and domination are depicted or challenged through media texts (Brooks & Ward, 2007; Maudlin & Sandlin, 2015; Petrone & Gibney, 2005). This is an important aspect of critical literacy that research suggests is particularly beneficial for engaging student-participants of privilege in critical pedagogy (Allen & Rosado, 2009; Brooks & Ward, 2007; Foss, 2002).
The Unit uses Hobbs’s (2007) five critical questions to problematize media texts and frame instruction:

1. Who is sending the message and what is the author’s purpose?
2. What techniques are used to attract and hold attention?
3. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in this message?
4. How might different people interpret this message differently?
5. What is omitted from this message? (p. 9)

These questions align with key elements of CML, including issues of representation and omission. Throughout the Unit, these questions were used to guide discussion during instruction through the use of the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018). They were also integrated into instruments for data collection, including the pretest and posttest (Appendix D).

Much of the Unit involves the analysis of advertisements, and research has suggested that advertisements can be particularly effective materials for media analysis, including analysis of the politics of representation (Hobbs, 2007; Parry, 2016; Reichert, LaTour, Lambaise, & Adkins, 2007). As Hobbs (2007) explains, this analysis is particularly valuable because in our consumer-driven culture, “[a]dvertising saturates the cultural environment of the adolescent and provides a form of socialization that shapes social attitudes and behaviors” (p. 72). Furthermore, the ability to examine the powers of persuasion and propaganda through the analysis of advertisements (Hobbs, 2007) is highly relevant to the context of this study because AP ELC focuses on the analysis of argument and rhetoric (College Board, 2014). As such, this action research study
incorporates an examination of the politics of representation through the critical analysis of a variety of media texts, including advertisements.

**CML and Popular Culture and Multimodal Texts**

Though shunned by some traditionalists, there is academic and social value in teaching with popular culture. As Buckingham (2003) points out, these texts have the ability to increase the relevance of the curriculum to student-participants’ lives and to society at large. Research has demonstrated several benefits that can be achieved by incorporating popular culture texts in the curriculum. Having student-participants analyze and interrogate their favorite media texts helps student-participants understand the various purposes of media coverage, including “developing and maintaining social identities, feeling a personal sense of significance, engaging in social interaction, and maintaining social relationships” (Fortuna, 2015, pp. 87-88). Teaching with popular culture has also been shown to engage students in active learning, particularly when students are involved in producing content themselves (Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016). Ultimately, literacy is a social practice, and popular culture texts play a significant role in student-participants’ lives as literate individuals; as their teacher, I would be remiss not to integrate this into my teaching (Alvermann, 2011).

Many popular culture texts are considered multimodal texts, which include at least two modes of communication (written and spoken language, music, video, sound and visual effects, etc.). In addition to the novelty and increased interest offered by these types of texts, there are also academic benefits, particularly as related to literacy education. For example, a study by Nagle and Stooke (2016) found that multimedia texts have the “potential to bridge gaps between students’ in-school and out-of-school lives.
and underscore the importance of allowing students to draw on their out-of-school identities and interests to guide explorations of curriculum content” (p. 158). This again speaks to the concept of relevance, which is incredibly valuable when it comes to engaging student-participants and making education meaningful for them.

Notably, the AP ELC Course Description also emphasizes the value of teaching with popular culture texts:

Because the AP English Language and Composition course seeks to cultivate rhetorical reading skills, texts with persuasive purposes drawn from popular culture are suitable for inclusion in the course reading list. Advertisements, propaganda, advice columns, television and radio talk shows and interviews, newspaper columns, cartoons, political commentaries, documentary films, TED Talks, and YouTube videos are only a few examples of texts that represent contributions to public discussion of consequential topics and questions. (CB, 2014, pp. 26-27)

College Board’s inclusion of popular culture texts demonstrates a recognition of the value of teaching such texts and provides solid justification for their use in the AP ELC curriculum.

**Benefits of teaching with popular culture.** Research has shown that using popular culture to teach CML can increase students’ sensitivity and understanding of issues of gender and other forms of representation in the media. Puchner, Markowitz, and Hedley (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of a CML program on gender stereotypes. Their research study employed a two-group design with one group receiving CML instruction, and the researchers concluded that “the CML unit was generally successful at
increasing the…understanding of target issues” (p. 23). In a qualitative study, Gainer (2010) described the effectiveness of CML and media production on students’ awareness of the “politics of representation,” a concept Luke, O’Brien, and Comber (2001) described as the way in which texts “work politically to construct and position writers and readers in relations of power and knowledge” (as cited in Gainer, 2010, pp. 365-6). Through dialogue and collaboration, students explored the politics of representation by evaluating physical, social, and ideological contexts of media texts. In addition to having students “analyze and critique dominant narratives,” Gainer (2010) also incorporated a media production element, which provided students with the opportunity to “take power to coconstruct their own identities through alternative representations—counternarratives that talk back to oppressive myths of dominant discourse” (p. 372).

Research also reveals another benefit of teaching with popular culture: its ability to increase student engagement. A study by Daniels (2012) explored the use of teaching documentary films to enhance student engagement with and understanding of key concepts studied in a sociology course. In this study, Daniels used the following protocol to teach documentary: have students complete related readings before watching the documentary, complete a “Video Worksheet” while watching the documentary, and work in small groups to answer the questions on the worksheet after watching the documentary. The “Video Worksheet” includes the same questions for each documentary, guiding students to deconstruct and analyze the documentary. By scaffolding the teaching of CML concepts and having students complete the same formative assessment task for each documentary, students are able to build their CML skills throughout the course. Daniels collected data from “Video Worksheets,” student
surveys, and interviews, and his findings suggest that CML can help improve student engagement in class content as well as their critical reading of visual and written texts. Similarly, the Unit featured in this DiP uses the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018) with most of the media texts studied, allowing student-participants to refine their CML skills throughout the Unit.

**Critical enjoyment.** Alverman and Hagood (2000) warn that when teachers incorporate popular media texts and engage students in media literacy instruction, they must be careful to avoid overemphasizing criticism to the point that it diminishes students’ enjoyment of the media texts that they enjoy because “young people may view any attempt to pull popular culture into the school as co-opting what they value most about such culture—its marginality” (p. 197). Popular media are a form of entertainment that many children find extremely valuable, and educators must remain mindful of that if they are to continue to encourage student engagement and growth (Hobbs, 2007).

To this end, Gainer (2010) suggests what she calls *critical enjoyment*, which capitalizes on the ability for media literacy to increase student engagement while taking great care to keep the aspects of criticism and enjoyment in balance. In an effort to define this concept, Gainer conducted a descriptive study with a purposive sample of middle school teachers, identifying the following themes: (1) a commitment to mutual respect for the experiences and insights of both students and teachers; (2) incorporating media that align with adolescents’ interests, including those they do or are likely to enjoy; (3) the development of a language and framework for productive media analysis; (4) active and social learning; (5) flexible instructional roles that encourage co-learning with both students and teachers; and (6) reflective student practice. The Unit used in this DiP
was designed with these principles in mind, embodied in the dialogic, student-centered, inquiry-based nature of the Unit’s delivery.

**Important considerations for implementation.** Research has identified several considerations that teachers must remain mindful of for meaningful and effective instruction, and the design and delivery of the Unit took these concerns into consideration. For example, teachers must avoid sporadic and didactic ML instruction because it has the potential to cause disengagement, rather than an increase in engagement (Banerjee & Kubey, 2013; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). Teachers should also make sure students are active participants in the learning experience, which is in congruence with the theoretical groundwork that positions CML instruction as active, participatory, and collaborative in nature (Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a; Morrell, et al., 2013). Not only is this in line with progressive education, as originally framed by Dewey (1938), but a meta-analysis of the literature has also demonstrated that active learning is more effective than passive learning for media literacy instruction (Banerjee & Kubey, 2013). Meta-analyses have also shown that the length of the intervention is an important consideration, with longer-term or more frequent interventions proving to be more effective (Banerjee & Kubey, 2013; Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012; Jowallah, 2015).

Teachers of ML and CML must also be mindful to avoid potential pitfalls. For example, Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) emphasize that, though media literacy holds great potential for mediating the effects of stereotyping in the media, teachers should be cognizant of the danger of inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes and perceived distinctions between social in-groups and out-groups. Also, as discussed in the section
on critical enjoyment, Alvermann and Hagood (2000) warn that students may see the inclusion of popular culture materials as co-opting materials they enjoy.

In addition to the abovementioned pitfalls, there are institutional challenges that educators may face when implementing ML and CML instruction. Perhaps most significantly, many teachers and students lack prior experience with ML and CML because there has historically been little emphasis on these literacies in schools and in teacher-training programs (Kellner & Share, 2005; Joanou, 2017). This may be due, at least in part, to the essentialist back-to-basics movement and its emphasis on standardized testing, which has been compounded by the influence of corporate interests on curriculum (Kellner & Share, 2005).

In addition, critics of CML instruction often allege that it politicizes media education; however, CML educators resist these “relativist and apolitical notions,” arguing that although an “ambiguous non-partisan stance” makes CML instruction more palatable and accessible to some educators and students, it, more importantly, “waters down the transformative potential for media education to become a powerful instrument to challenge oppression and strengthen democracy” (Kellner & Share, 2007a, p. 8). Critical theorists have long challenged the concept of apolitical education, asserting that all education is inherently political due to its role in the socialization process, whether it serves to perpetuate or to confront existing systems and structures of inequality (Apple, 1992, 2004; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Counts, 1932; Giroux, 1997). Garcia, Seglum, and Share (2013) argue that, particularly in our current educational climate, which promotes standardization of curriculum and high-stakes testing, educators must “recognize the conservative nature of education and commercial media, and challenge
their role in replicating dominant ideologies and oppressive social structures” (Garcia, Seglum, & Share, 2013, p. 111). As this research suggests, it is essential that teachers remain mindful of these challenges and concerns while engaging students in a critical and meaningful exploration of influential ideologies and social structures through CML instruction.

**Existing Research on Media Literacy and Critical Media Literacy**

Media are a major transmitter of culture, and theorists Kellner and Share (2005, 2009) argue that CML is an ideal vehicle for teaching for democracy due to its ability to address the participation gap, promote multicultural education, and incorporate issues of representation and social justice into a literacy curriculum. To this end, research has suggested several valuable social and academic benefits of ML and CML instruction, including the potential to increase the following: civic engagement, awareness about issues of representation and stereotyping, student engagement and motivation, student achievement, and multicultural literacy and cultural competency. All of these capacities are valuable to the identified PoP and the objective of this proposed DiP to increase student-participants’ engagement in AP English Language and Composition, which College Board (2014) has described as a course that endeavors to help student-participants develop critical literacy and informed citizenship.

**Civic Engagement**

Several research studies have explored the potential for ML and CML instruction to encourage civic engagement. Studies by Hobbs and Martens (2015) and Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem, and Moen (2013) explore concepts related to civic engagement and news and media literacy. Stemming from the theoretical view that “civic engagement
contributes to the quality of public life,” Hobbs and Martens (2015) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 400 American students to evaluate the effectiveness of a school-based media literacy program, and their findings suggest positive associations among information-seeking motives, media knowledge, and news analysis skills. In another study, Hobbs et al. (2013) had students complete an online questionnaire, which they used to examine the impact of a video production course in a suburban high school setting, and their findings suggest two things: (1) There is a positive relationship between civic engagement and positive attitudes about the news, and (2) positive attitudes about the news and media literacy competencies are good predictors of anticipated civic engagement.

Relatedly, McDougall, Berger, and Zezulkova (2015) conducted an exploratory pilot study examining the existence of a connection between media literacy education and meaningful civic engagement. In their study, they employed a “5 As” framework for media literacy, which includes access, appreciation, awareness, assessment, and action, with a small sample of six pairs of teenagers, where half of the students were enrolled in media studies courses and the other half were not. Their mapping of the responses from an online profiling exercise revealed that students in the media studies courses were more comfortable in digital spaces and more positive about media and their potential to empower, whereas students who were not in the media studies courses were more suspicious about media and more reluctant to engage in media production.

These studies suggest that ML/CML instruction has the potential to promote the ideals of a democratic society by encouraging civic engagement and increasing students’
critical literacy practices. This is further exemplified through the exploration of representation and stereotyping, as discussed below.

**Representation and Stereotyping**

In addition to the Ranieri and Fabbro (2016) study discussed above, several other studies have explored the utility for ML/CML instruction in exploring issues of representation and combating stereotypes. In a meta-analysis of existing quantitative and qualitative research, Scharrer & Ramasubramanian (2015) identified several valuable findings from previous media literacy research related to stereotypes of race and ethnicity: ML has the potential to shift attitudes and promote knowledge, as has been demonstrated in studies related to topics such as violence, body image, advertising, and alcohol and tobacco use (p. 173); students as young as 12 can recognize the limits of media’s representation and treatment of race and ethnicity, as well as the harm it can cause; though stereotypical representations of people of color appear frequently in commercial media, “students can be inspired to critique those depictions and the institutional forces that create them” (p. 182); and ML can help students address issues of prejudice and racial bias, promoting an appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism (p. 183).

Berman and White (2013) evaluated the impact of a program called SeeMe on eighth-grade students’ media literacy skills as related to body image, gender awareness, and gender and cultural stereotypes in the media. Using a mixed-methods design, they found that participants became more critical of media representations and techniques used in advertising, with the program increasing students’ awareness of the inaccuracy of representation of women’s bodies in the media and the strong cultural biases that result in
the overrepresentation of White women and underrepresentation of women of color.

Berman and White (2013) also found that the strongest literacy observed was the ability to identify construction techniques used to attract and hold an audience’s attention; this finding is particularly relevant to the context for this DiP, as it takes place in an AP ELC course with the intention of engaging student-participants more meaningfully in rhetorical analysis.

In another study of middle-school students, Puchner, Markowitz, and Hedley (2015) explored the impact of a CML unit on students’ ability to “deconstruct hidden messages in the media,” particularly those related to gender and gender stereotypes (p. 30). More specifically, they explored whether the CML unit would affect students’ beliefs about gender discrimination in the workplace, gender stereotypes in the media (including occupational associations), and the media’s ability to influence people’s ways of thinking about gender. Through using a field experiment with a pretest-posttest comparison group, they found that students demonstrated an increase in sensitivity to items about gender discrimination in the workplace and about media influencing the way people think about men and women, including that the media has hidden images about gender. This is also directly relevant to this proposed DiP, as it intends to examine gender representation and the presence of gender stereotypes in the media.

Huang (2015) conducted a qualitative study with a group of ninth-grade students, examining how CML “transforms ways of engaging with media texts and expands the understanding and practice of literacy” (p. 333). Through an examination of student artifacts and the researcher’s own observations, Huang (2015) found that watching a television show became a social practice through which students were able to develop a
critical voice in relation to the social construction of discrimination. Student dialogue was fruitful and engaged, and the discussion of representation led to a discussion of masculinity in culture, a fairly unusual occurrence in the literature that is particularly promising for the context of this proposed DiP. Huang (2015) did, however, report a we/they dichotomy in some discussions, which is something the teacher-researcher intends to remain alert to during implementation. Overall, Huang (2015) found that “a critical rather than protectionist approach to media can better allow students to reflect on the ideologies of media construction as lived experiences and social engagement” (p. 335), which illustrates the value of implementing critical media literacy intervention.

These studies suggest that CML instruction is effective in exploring issues related to representation and stereotyping, further promoting democratic ideals and building a more informed capacity for productive civic engagement. This is particularly relevant to this proposed DiP because of its implementation in an AP English Language and Composition class, as College Board (2014) has identified informed citizenship as one of the overarching course objectives.

**Student Engagement and Motivation**

Hobbs (2007) argues that media literacy is effective at increasing student curiosity, interest, and motivation. Research suggests that this may be due to the novelty of such activities (Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016; Hur & Oh, 2012; Liu, Toprac, & Yuen, 2009; Stupans, Scutter, & Pearce, 2010). More specifically, research also suggests that the incorporation of multiple pedagogical techniques, such as those used in CML instruction, can engage students in more meaningful discussion of issues
related to diversity, such as race, masculinity, and femininity, and this has shown the potential to impact student perspectives and behaviors (Brooks & Ward, 2007).

Greene et al. (2015) argue that student engagement is necessary for media literacy interventions to impact student behavior. By conducting a pilot study and longitudinal feasibility test with tenth-grade students, Greene et al. (2015) evaluated a theoretically-grounded measure and confirmed the theory that “[a]udiences’ degree of engagement with media literacy programs is a necessary condition for initiating the acquisition of knowledge and critical thinking skills that adolescents need to interpret media messages and portrayals” (p. 6). They also found statistically moderate correlations between the subscales of engagement and reflectiveness, which suggests that meaningful engagement with the content helps students apply the knowledge to their lives through reflection and self-regulation (Green et al., 2015).

In an exploration of the utility of using popular culture to increase student engagement and motivation through active learning, Dune, Bidewell, Firdhaus, and Kirwan (2016) conducted a study with a sample of 569 undergraduate students who were given the opportunity to review course concepts by participating in a voluntary media production competition. In an analysis of survey results, Dune et al. (2016) found that though most students (64%) cited external motivations for their choice to compete (the possibility of winning a prize), a greater majority of students (79%) indicated that they were attracted to the competition because it involved students developing the content through media production. Further, they found that the students who chose to compete reported that they found the activity fun (85%) and instructive (64%), and that, overall, the videos were perceived to be educationally valuable and entertaining.
Though not directly evaluating the effects of ML and CML instruction, Jowallah (2015) examined the effects of critical literacy instruction, which holds some transferability to CML due to its theoretical grounding in critical pedagogy (Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Jowallah (2015) conducted a qualitative study of a one-semester critical literacy course, analyzing student questionnaires, teacher journal entries, and student and teacher interviews. Jowallah’s (2015) research revealed several promising findings: Scaffolding and problem-posing are essential in critical activities; the majority of students responded well to critical literacy lessons, desiring more lessons like them; students reported a willingness to speak up if someone said something they felt was not right, suggesting engagement in social justice; and teachers reported an increase in student engagement, responsiveness, motivation, and the quantity and quality of discourse. However, it is also important to note that Jowallah’s (2015) findings also suggested that students may exhibit avoidance in the early stages of critical literacy instruction and may not be fully aware of the benefits of engaging in discussion.

In demonstrating the capacity for critical literacy, media literacy, and critical media literacy to increase student engagement and motivation, these studies support the view that the instructional intervention proposed in this DiP is appropriate for increasing student engagement in course content.

**Academic Achievement**

In the first study to provide empirical evidence of the impact of media literacy on academic achievement, Hobbs (2007) examined the effects of a yearlong eleventh-grade media literacy course designed to help students develop critical literacy skills. Employing a mixed-methods design, Hobbs (2007) documented students’ developing
skills in critical reading, critical viewing, critical listening, and political efficacy, examining the adolescent as citizen. Using a matched control group for comparison, Hobbs (2007) found that the students in the media literacy course demonstrated more improvement in the skills of summarizing and analyzing rhetorical techniques in nonfiction print texts.

In a later study on that same course, Hobbs and Frost (2003) used nonequivalent group design to evaluate students’ acquisition of literacy skills, including reading comprehension, writing skills, critical reading, critical listening, and critical viewing skills for nonfiction informational texts. The study found that ML instruction improves students’ ability to understand and summarize information from reading, listening, and viewing; more specifically, writing analysis showed that ML students wrote longer paragraphs (statistically significant) and nonfiction analysis revealed significant differences in students’ ability to identify construction techniques, point of view, omitted information, comparison-contrast, and media purpose. These findings are all significant to this proposed DiP and identified PoP, as these skills are central to the AP English Language and Composition course in which the study takes place.

A qualitative study by Young and Daunic (2012) connected traditional literacy with new literacies, demonstrating how educators can build media literacy, critical thinking, and traditionally-tested literacy skills simultaneously. By evaluating case studies and engaging in cross-case analysis, Young and Daunic (2012) established that media literacy can support the following traditional literacy skills: using the writing process, targeting a specific audience, understanding perspective, and evaluating argument. Furthermore, they found additional evidence that media literacy programs can
increase student interest and engagement in literacy practices. As these studies demonstrate, research has supported the use of CML in engaging student-participants in traditional literacy practices, such as rhetorical analysis.

**Multicultural Literacy and Cultural Competency**

In addition to the abovementioned academic skills, CML can be used to encourage social skills that are beneficial for informed citizenship. One such skill is multicultural literacy, which Kellner and Share (2005) describe as “understanding and engaging the heterogeneity of cultures and subcultures that constitute an increasingly global and multicultural world” (p. 372). Kim (2016) suggests that this increase in understanding and engagement may be due to increased access to new and culturally diverse media texts, which she argues students are already uncritically examining in informal contexts and should be critically examining in formal contexts. Relatedly, Grant and Bolin (2016) argue that media literacy can promote cultural competency because “[t]echnology and social media allow educators to connect to cultural and diverse stories while disseminating information globally and expanding educational reach” (p. 44). In their study, Grant and Bolin (2016) found that the implementation of digital storytelling was useful for increasing student engagement with diversity issues, which also increased their cultural competency by cultivating an awareness and engagement with social issues.

**Conclusion**

As this review of literature demonstrates, the implementation of CML instruction holds much promise for student-participants intellectually, socially, and academically. More specifically, empirical research has documented the potential for CML to promote civic engagement, increase awareness about issues of representation and stereotyping,
improve student engagement and motivation, increase student achievement, and promote multicultural literacy and cultural competency. These findings are important for this DiP, which sought to use CML intervention to engage student-participants more meaningfully in rhetorical analysis in an AP ELC setting.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology for this Dissertation in Practice. This action research study used a qualitative design to describe the impact of the unit *Reading Mass Media* in an AP English Language and Composition (AP ELC) course at Lowcountry High School (LHS) (pseudonym), located in rural South Carolina.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in action research differs in many ways from the role of the researcher in traditional educational research. In traditional research, researchers are often “somewhat removed from the environment they are studying” (Mertler, 2017, p. 7); action research, on the other hand, is “done by teachers for teachers” and often used “to improve educational practice” and “develop and test solutions” to address local challenges (p. 31). In this action research study, I was a full and active participant, serving as both practitioner and researcher, and the environment being studied was my own classroom. This close connection to the research site and participants provided me with more insight into the inner workings of the institution as well as a more vested interest in the practical application and local implications of the findings of the research. This closeness also presented a challenge for me as a teacher-researcher: remaining objective and not allowing my results to be affected by bias (Mertler, 2017).
Mills (2007) contrasts traditional and action research methods by describing teachers engaged in action research as “committed to taking action and effecting positive educational change based on their findings, rather than being satisfied with reporting their conclusions to others” (p. 3). This action research study, where I was involved as a full and active participant in the study, is also designed with that intent in mind. Though the need for critical media literacy instruction extends beyond the walls of the research site, my primary goal is to effect positive educational change in my classroom, better preparing my student-participants for success on the AP ELC exam, in future courses, and in their adult lives.

In this AR study, I conducted a systematic investigation into the implementation of a unit I designed for my AP ELC course to address the identified Problem of Practice (PoP). AP ELC requires student-participants to conduct rhetorical analysis, a technique which involves teaching student-participants how to critically analyze texts for their rhetorical, as opposed to aesthetic, function (College Board, 2014). Some student-participants at LHS enter the AP ELC class without a clear understanding of how to do rhetorical analysis, a core skill tested on the exam. Though student performance on the AP ELC exam has improved over the past five years, the existing curriculum and pedagogy at LHS does not adequately prepare student-participants for the level of rhetorical analysis required on the AP ELC exam (College Board 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). As the teacher-researcher, I conducted a thorough review of existing curriculum and pedagogy, and the development of media literacy skills was poorly represented in the existing curriculum. In an effort to create another access point for the difficult skill of rhetorical analysis, I designed a unit that combines rhetorical analysis
and critical media literacy, called *Reading Mass Media*. In the Unit, student-participants engage in meta-learning about media (Mears, 2010) and rhetorically analyze a variety of media texts, including advertisements and commercials. I developed this particular intervention because media literacy instruction challenges the banking model of education (Freire, 1970/2000) and has been shown to improve academic achievement, including reading comprehension and critical analysis skills (Hobbs, 2007).

**Action Research Trustworthiness**

One of the criticisms and challenges of action research is establishing trustworthiness. In traditional research, researchers often have more control over the conditions in which the research occurs, such as sampling, variables, and the use of control groups. In action research, these elements are often limited by the nature of the research site. Action research takes place in real classrooms in real schools with real students, not in a lab or research facility with a carefully selected sample, and many complications arise that would not be conducive to traditional research methods. However, the reiterative and flexible nature of action research (Mertler, 2017) also allows the researcher to do something traditional research cannot: Rather than being rigidly held to predetermined conditions and implementations, the teacher-researcher can do what teachers are trained to do—monitor and adjust. Because action research “allows teachers to be more flexible in their thinking, more receptive to new ideas, and more organized in their approach to problem solving” (p. 24), the teacher-researcher can learn from mistakes and observations made during the study and, when necessary, adapt the study to better suit the needs of the students in her classroom.
At its core, action research is focused more on effecting change in local contexts than producing overall generalizability. Action researchers can, however, take steps to increase the overall rigor of their research. In this study, I used several strategies recommended by Mertler (2017), including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, polyangulation, member checking, participant debriefing, diverse case analysis, and referential adequacy (pp. 26-27).

Using action research methodology (Dana and Yendol-Hoppy, 2014; Mertler, 2017; Mills, 2007), I collected qualitative data using classroom observations, pre- and post-instruction student surveys with Likert-type rating scales and open-ended semi-structured interview questions (Appendices M and N), a pretest and posttest (Appendix D), and a focus-group interview (Appendix P). To evaluate student engagement throughout the Unit, I conducted observations using the fieldnotes page (Appendix K) and the group discussion observation checklist (Appendix L). To document student perceptions, the student-participants completed a survey at the beginning and end of the Unit (Appendices M and N), and I used survey results and observations to guide the focus-group interview with student-participants at the end of the Unit. To evaluate student performance, the student-participants completed a pretest and a posttest. These data were then analyzed to design the action plan described in Chapter Five.

Research Context

The research site, LHS, is a public high school in the Lowcountry region of South Carolina. I, the teacher-researcher, have been an English teacher at LHS for eleven years, and I have taught AP ELC for nine years. Since attending training through University of California, Los Angeles, in 2010, I have gained vast experience teaching AP ELC. I have
also attended professional development pertaining to media literacy, including sessions taught by Frank Baker (2016).

LHS is currently on semester block schedules, but the AP ELC course is yearlong, which means student-participants are in the course for ninety minutes a day throughout the entire school year. As action research, this study includes a convenience sample, and the population includes AP ELC student-participants from the two sections of the course I teach. At LHS, AP ELC is currently open to juniors and seniors, though most student-participants are juniors. All of the student-participants enrolled in AP ELC have completed two Honors-level English classes in high school before taking the course.

**Design of the Study**

This action research project was designed using the model described by Mertler (2017), which includes four stages: planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. Mertler emphasizes that this process is often cyclical and iterative, and that teacher reflection is an integral part of this form of research. As such, the design described in this section was continually refined throughout the study’s planning, preparation, and implementation.

**Planning.** The first stage of Mertler’s (2017) model is the planning stage, which is in itself an iterative and cyclical endeavor. The first steps of this stage involve identifying a Problem of Practice (PoP), establishing a focus for the action research, gathering information about the topic through a review of literature, and developing a research question and a research plan.

**Identifying and limiting the topic.** As an AP ELC teacher, most of my instruction revolves around critical literacy and rhetorical analysis. Through observations of my own classes and discussions with my colleagues, I noticed that student-participants
entering AP ELC were ill-prepared for the rigor of the course, often finding it difficult to engage meaningfully in both rhetorical and literary analysis. Student-participants often rush through readings and misread entire passages, which suggests they have not been taught how to engage in these difficult literacy practices. While formulating my topic, I was also taken aback by the amount of misinformation and misrepresentation I was seeing being posted and shared through social media, often finding its way into the classroom.

Research supports these observations, as evidenced by a recent study by Stanford History Education Group (2016), where researchers conducted an eighteen-month study investigating students’ “ability to judge the credibility of information that floods [their] smartphones, tablets, and computers” (p. 2). The group reported what they described as “bleak” findings (p. 4) for students from the middle school to the college level: “in every case and at every level, we were taken aback by students’ lack of preparation” (p. 4). These findings are of particular concern to me as an educator, especially as an educator who teaches a critical literacy course. These combined forces encouraged me to delve into the broad topic of media literacy. Given my joint concerns of engagement and media literacy, as well as the nature of AP ELC as a critical literacy course, I was drawn to the concept of critical media literacy and the politics of representation for the focus of the Unit used in my study. In addition to providing meaningful instruction, researchers have found that critical analysis of popular culture texts can be effective in improving student engagement (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Daniels, 2012; Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016), an outcome that aligns with this study’s Problem of Practice.
Gathering preliminary information. Mertler (2017) describes this phase of the action research process as one that involves the researcher engaging in reconnaissance, which involves self-reflection, description, and explanation (p. 59). My educational philosophy is a blend of progressivism (Dewey, 1938), constructivism (Adams, 2006; Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2007; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Kincheloe, 2005), and critical theory (Freire, 1970/2000, 2013; hooks, 1994, 2010; Horton & Freire, 1990). As an AP ELC teacher, I teach primarily nonfiction, which naturally leads to the exploration, discussion, and dissection of social issues—both historical and current—and I believe the nature of the subject I teach has influenced my educational philosophy. If I were a teacher of classic works and forms of literature, I believe I would have a more perennialist philosophy. It is my belief that education has an important social function: It should prepare students to be active and informed citizens in a participatory democracy. The nature of the course also reflects this: According to the course overview, the goals of the course are “developing critical literacy” and “facilitating informed citizenship” (College Board, 2014, p. 11).

By teaching student-participants who are developmentally and academically prepared to engage in the exploration and discussion of important social issues, I am afforded with a valuable opportunity to engage student-participants in dialogue about culturally relevant real-world issues, ideally piquing student-participants’ interests and helping them find their personal interests and passions while also preparing them to be informed citizens and skilled employees. This philosophical stance aligns with the South Carolina Department of Education’s (2017) Profile of the South Carolina Graduate, which includes the “world-class skills” of creativity, critical thinking, and problem
solving, as well as the “life and career characteristics” of integrity, self-direction, global perspective, work ethic, and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, by endeavoring to use critical media literacy to engage student-participants in rhetorical analysis and better prepare them for the AP ELC exam, this also aligns with the Profile’s description of world-class knowledge that includes “rigorous standards in language arts…for career and college readiness” (SCDOE, 2017). This emphasis on testing is also evidenced in standards, policies, and practices from the local to the national level, and is especially significant when teaching a course that concludes with a standardized test that is used for teacher accountability and school report card data, such as the AP ELC exam.

**Reviewing the related literature.** I have conducted a thorough and continuous review of the literature on approaches to media literacy, including critical media literacy (CML), and the educational philosophies described above, including both primary and secondary sources. My reading includes foundational literature about CML by Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share (2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009); theoretical literature about critical theory and progressivism by Paulo Freire (1970/2000, 2013; Horton & Freire, 1990; Macedo & Freire, 1987), bell hooks (1994, 2010), and John Dewey (1916, 1938); and a variety of research studies and professional literature in the broader field of media literacy (Baker, 2016; Beach, n.d.; Buckingham, 2003; Carducci & Rhoads, 2005; Hobbs, 2007, 2011; Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Kibbey, 2011; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007; Masterman, 1985; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012; Thevenin & Mihailidis, 2012) as well as the more specified field of critical media literacy (Alverman, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Daniels, 2012; Gainer, 2010; Garcia, Seglem, & Share, 2013; Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Morrell, 2012; Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2009; Punchner, Markowitz, &
Hedley, 2015). It is my hope that this sort of CML instruction will help student-participants become more engaged and more informed, while also reinforcing the rhetorical analysis skills I teach with traditional print texts.

**Development of the research plan.** Step four of Mertler’s (2017) planning stage involves development of a research plan to investigate my research question: *What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?* Though I used a qualitative design, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data to allow for polyangulation (Mertler, 2017). Quantitative data include a survey featuring Likert-type questions, administered at the beginning and the end of the Unit. I collected data from multiple sources throughout data collection, which took approximately eight weeks. My role in this study was to be that of a full participant, acting as both a member of the classroom community and the researcher (Mertler, 2017, p. 96). In accordance with the methods of action research, I used a convenience sample of the student-participants assigned to my AP ELC classes. There was no control group to ensure all student-participants enrolled in the course receive the same educational opportunities. Though I used direct instruction to introduce the concepts of media literacy and to teach student-participants deconstruction techniques (Baker, 2016), the curriculum and the majority of instruction was student-centered, and my role was primarily that of a facilitator to guide and assist them in their critical analysis and production of media texts.

**Ethical considerations.** Throughout the research process, I ensured that ethical guidelines were being followed and ethical standards were being met. In addition to obtaining Exempt status for my action research study from the university Institutional...
Review Board, I adhered to my district’s protocol for research approval and took all necessary measures to protect my student-participants and their data. Because my student-participants are all minors, I obtained both informed parent consent and informed student assent using forms designed according to Mertler’s (2017) principle of accurate disclosure (Appendix O). Following Mertler’s guidelines and recommendations, this letter included a description of the study, a description of student participation and the data to be collected, an assurance that participation is completely voluntary with an option to opt-out at any time without penalty, a guarantee of confidentiality throughout the research process, and an offer to provide participants a summary of the study’s findings (p. 110-11). In the study, I addressed confidentiality by (1) randomly assigning student-participants numbers for data collection, analysis, and reporting, and (2) using pseudonyms for any narrative or descriptive detail when reporting my findings. I was also extremely mindful to ensure that fairness was maintained and all student-participants received the same treatment and level of interaction and feedback, regardless of whether they chose to participate in the study.

This action research study also takes into consideration three key principles emphasized by Mertler (2017), the principles of beneficence, honesty, and importance. The principles of beneficence and importance are central to the purpose of this proposed research: to evaluate the impact of critical media literacy instruction on (1) student engagement in rhetorical analysis, an academically important skill as determined by course content and academic standards, and (2) student sensitivity to the construct of media representation, a socially important concept in regards to how student-participants see themselves, others, and the world in which they live. The principle of beneficence,
“to acquire knowledge about human beings and the educational process” (p. 115), is inherent in the attempt to see whether a specific instructional approach, critical media literacy instruction, will impact the skill of rhetorical analysis. The principle of importance, which says that “the findings of research should somehow be likely to contribute to human knowledge or be useful elsewhere in education” (p. 115), is inherent in my desire to improve my own practice and to share my insights with my professional communities. The third principle, the principle of honesty, which states that “honesty must be exhibited in all aspects of a research study” (p. 115), was adhered to through all stages of the research process, from planning to acting to collecting to reporting.

**Acting.** The second stage of Mertler’s (2017) model is the *acting* stage, which includes data collection and analysis. As the teacher-researcher, I used a qualitative action research design. Though my primary data set included qualitative data, it was polyangulated using quantitative data. This allowed me to evaluate the impact of the Unit, particularly as related to my student-participants’ engagement in rhetorical analysis and their sensitivity to issues of representation. Though I had a detailed research plan, the nature of action research offered me some flexibility to make adjustments if necessary. Mertler (2017) emphasizes that action researchers, as opposed to traditional researchers, have the flexibility to adjust the lines of inquiry throughout the research process if warranted, citing Mills’s (2001) description of action research as one that is “intimate, open-ended, and often serendipitous. Being clear about a problem is critical in the beginning, but once practitioner-researchers begin to systematically collect their data, the area of focus will become even clearer” (as cited in Mertler, 2017, p. 117).
Sample. Given the restrictions of my role as teacher-researcher and the context-specific goals of action research (Mertler, 2017), this proposed action research study used a convenience sample drawn from my own classroom at the research site. All student-participants from my AP ELC classes who had parent permission to participate were included in the study. The study took place during the first semester of a year-long class, and treatment conditions were replicated in both sections of the course.

Data collection. To establish baseline data, student-participants completed a pretest at the beginning of the study, which included rhetorical analysis questions about a visual media text (Appendix D; adapted from Hobbs, 2007). I also administered a pre-instruction survey, which included Likert-type rating scales as well as open-ended semi-structured interview questions to gather information about student preconceptions about media and media texts (Appendix M). Throughout the study, I conducted class observations to monitor and evaluate student engagement. Findings were recorded using the fieldnotes page (Appendix K) and group discussion checklist (Appendix L). At the conclusion of the study, student-participants completed a posttest and post-instruction survey, both designed in the same manner as what was administered at the beginning of the study to increase reliability of the measure (see Appendices D, M, and N). The pretest and posttest were identical, with the exception of one more carefully worded question on the posttest (for more information, see Appendix D), and the only difference in the survey was the addition of open-ended questions related to the Unit. Data from the survey was used to inform the focus-group interview, which were transcribed and used to gather student insights and perceptions on the Unit. Using multiple forms of data
allowed me to document performance at multiple points throughout the Unit, providing me with the data needed for polyangulation.

**Data analysis.** This study relied on an inductive analysis of data collected, noting patterns, formulating tentative hypotheses, and developing conclusions, as described by Mertler (2017). This not only allowed me to evaluate the impact of the Unit with my population; it will also be used to inform future practice, including future implementation of the Unit, an important and valuable quality inherent in the cyclical nature of action research.

For the qualitative data, which represents the primary data set, I organized the data using a coding scheme, described the patterns and connections discovered among the data, and interpreted the data from the coded categories, looking for “aspects of the data that answer [my] research questions, that provide challenges to current or future practice, or that actually may guide future practice” (Mertler, 2017, p. 175). Qualitative data included observations, pretest and posttest responses, open-ended semi-structured interview questions on the surveys, and focus-group interview responses.

Quantitative data, including Likert-type questions on the surveys and any qualitative data quantified through the coding process, were collected to allow for polyangulation with the primary data set. These data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and used to polyangulate with the qualitative data and provide a fuller understanding of the impact of the Unit. I used the mean to calculate central tendency with Likert-type response scale items, which allowed me to “indicate, with a single score, what is typical or standard about a group of individuals” (Mertler, 2017, p. 179). This was especially useful for measuring and comparing student perceptions before and after
the Unit. Ultimately, the findings of the quantitative data analysis will be combined with 
and compared to the findings of the qualitative data analysis, providing “a more 
comprehensive view of the topic being investigated” (Mertler, 2017, p. 196). Ultimately, 
the findings of the quantitative data analysis will be combined with and compared to the 
findings of the qualitative data analysis, providing “a more comprehensive view of the 
topic being investigated” (Mertler, 2017, p. 196).

Developing. The third stage of Mertler’s (2017) model is the developing stage, 
which included developing an action plan, described in Chapter Five of this Dissertation 
in Practice, based on the data collected and analyzed during the acting stage. I will use 
the findings of this present study to inform future practice and to develop a plan for future 
implementation of the Unit. Future action research cycles could also help me discover 
what strategies are most effective with my population, helping me further improve my 
craft as an educator.

Reflecting. The fourth and final stage of Mertler’s (2017) model is the reflecting 
stage, which includes reflecting on the study as a whole—its implementation, its findings, 
and the implications for future practice. Though reflection is integral throughout the 
action research process, it is especially important between the iterations of the action 
research cycle.

The reflecting stage offers the critical opportunity to look back at the 
implementation of the study with new insight provided from data analysis. I looked at 
my implementation of the Unit with a critical eye, evaluating to what degree I answered 
my research question and how accurately I followed my research design. I evaluated my 
measures, deciding whether the pretest, posttest, surveys, and assignments need revisions
or additions. I evaluated my observation methods, developing a more systematic approach based on my experience with this study. This is what makes the cyclical nature of action research so valuable: By learning from one cycle, the teacher-practitioner gains insights for improved practice and more effective implementation of the strategy in the next cycle.

**Conclusion**

Chapter Three of this Dissertation in Practice (DiP) has detailed the proposed methodology for this action research study. As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) emphasize, action research plays a vital role in an educator’s quest to better her practice and best serve her student-participants: “Working in the best interest of students you teach means carefully and systematically investigating your teaching and the relationship it has to your own students’ learning” (p. 149). By implementing Mertler’s (2017) action research cycle of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting, I systematically and reflectively addressed my research question: *What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?* Through this action research study, I engaged in this important reflective practice and focus on a locally identified, defined, and described Problem of Practice (PoP) in an effort to improve my teaching practice and to work in the best interests of my student-participants.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Four is to contextualize the findings and implications of this qualitative action research study describing the implementation of the unit Reading Mass Media, which was designed by the teacher-researcher with the input of her student-participants. This Unit was created for an AP English Language and Composition (AP ELC) class. This Unit was designed to address the identified Problem of Practice that involved student-participants doing rhetorical analysis using various types of advertisements to learn a core skill that is tested on the AP ELC exam. The AP ELC exam is a high-stakes exam that is taken at the end of the course and determines whether student-participants will receive college credit for the course. The present study describes student-participant perspectives and performance during the first implementation of this Unit in the teacher-researcher’s Advanced Placement English Language and Composition course, which took place in Fall 2018.

In the Unit, student-participants analyzed a variety of teacher-curated, student-selected advertisements. Print advertisements were selected from a variety of magazines with diverse target audiences (Appendix H), and television commercials were selected from a collection of 2018 Super Bowl commercials (USA Today, 2018). Analysis was guided by the Key Questions of Media Literacy and the Media Literacy Smartphone (Hobbs, 2007, 2001; Media Education Lab, 2018; see Appendix G), with an emphasis on
the examination of target audience, advertising techniques, and issues of representation (Baker, 2016; Kellner & Share, 2007a). In the culminating project, student-participants selected an advertisement they found problematic in its representation of people or products, wrote a rhetorical analysis essay, and created a counter-narrative in the form of a counter-advertisement, where they challenged what they viewed to be problematic representation (Quijada, 2013; see Appendix F). While some student-participants chose to critique the representation of people, examining patterns of stereotyping and representation, others chose to critique the representation of the product or service itself (see Appendix Q). Student-participants who focused on the representation of people drew from their own lived experiences and a Socratic seminar where student-participants discussed common stereotypes in TV and film (particularly those related to gender). Student-participants who focused on the representation of products or services being advertised drew on our study of weasel words and other misleading advertising strategies (Schrank, n.d.).

This qualitative action research (AR) study is guided by the following research question: *What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?* By analyzing a primary data set that includes a pretest and pre-instruction survey as well as a posttest and post-instruction survey, and polyangulating that with a secondary data set that includes observations and a focus-group interview, the teacher-researcher describes student-participants’ perceptions of and performance in the Unit. Chapter Four provides an overview of the data collection strategy; the processes of data analysis, reflection, and interpretation; and a discussion of how this AR study answers the research question.
**Problem of Practice Statement**

Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) requires students to conduct rhetorical analysis, a technique that involves teaching students how to critically analyze texts for their rhetorical, as opposed to aesthetic, function (College Board, 2014). At Lowcountry High School (LHS) (pseudonym), some student-participants enter my AP ELC class without a clear understanding of how to do rhetorical analysis, which is a core skill tested on the standardized exam required for AP credit. Though student performance on the AP ELC exam has improved over the past five years, the existing curriculum and pedagogy at LHS did not adequately prepare my southern, rural student-participants for the level of rhetorical analysis required on the AP ELC exam (College Board 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). As the teacher-researcher, I conducted a thorough review of existing curriculum and pedagogy, and I found that LHS’s existing AP ELC curriculum did not include units that focused on the development of media literacy skills. Therefore, in an effort to work with my student-participants to create an access point for them to do the difficult skill of rhetorical analysis, I designed and implemented a unit that combined rhetorical analysis and critical media literacy, called *Reading Mass Media*. In the Unit, student-participants engaged in meta-learning about media (Mears, 2010) and rhetorically analyzed a variety of media texts, such as advertisements and television commercials. I developed this constructivist media literacy unit to challenge the banking model of education made famous by Paulo Freire (1970/2000) that is traditionally used at LHS to teach reading comprehension and critical analysis skills.
Research Question

What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this action research study is to design and implement the unit Reading Mass Media with my AP ELC student-participants at LHS. The secondary purpose is to describe the impact the Unit had with my student-participants. To accomplish these goals, data from AP ELC student-participants at LHS, including a pretest and pre-instruction survey, classroom observations, a posttest and post-instruction survey, and a focus-group interview, were collected and reflexively analyzed. The tertiary purpose is to use the findings of this present study to design an action plan to adjust the Unit for future use with students at LHS.

Student-Participants

Student-participants. This study involves 38 student-participants who are enrolled in two sections of AP ELC taught by the teacher-researcher at Lowcountry High School (pseudonym), an ethnically and economically diverse public school in rural South Carolina. The teacher-researcher collected demographic data from student-participants themselves, allowing them to self-identify their race and gender. Twenty-eight student-participants are female, nine are male, and one is MtF transgender; 22 student-participants are White, 12 are Black, and four are mixed-race. According to data obtained from PowerTeacher (2018), two student-participants are English Language Learners with high levels of English proficiency. The student-participants come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and 15 student-participants are eligible for free or
reduced lunch. Thirty-seven student-participants are in eleventh grade, and one student is in twelfth grade. Though most student-participants have achievement levels corresponding at or slightly above grade-level, five student-participants have Lexile scores that reveal pronounced deficiencies. All student-participants are college-bound, with aspirations of going into a variety of fields, including medicine, fine arts, education, engineering, legal studies, and the military. To ensure confidentiality, student-participants were assigned pseudonyms for this study.

Throughout the study, feedback from my student-participants helped me develop the Unit and adapt it to better serve their needs. For example, though my intention was initially to create a high-interest unit that would help them improve their rhetorical analysis skills, an early discussion with my student-participants revealed that many student-participants were unclear what the term rhetorical analysis actually meant. To obtain more information about this important piece of data, I added three questions related specifically to student-participants’ understanding of and comfort with rhetorical analysis to the pre- and post-instructional surveys. In the pre-instructional survey, the findings of which are discussed in detail in this chapter, I discovered many student-participants had little understanding of or comfort with rhetorical analysis. As a result, the nature of my implementation of the Unit shifted to include more dialogue about how what we were doing reflected the skills of rhetorical analysis. Though subtle, this change in approach appears to have had a meaningful effect: The post-instructional survey revealed significant increases for the items related to the skills of rhetorical analysis, marking this as one of the most impactful aspects of the Unit for student-participants. As described in the action plan in Chapter Five, student-participant responses to the post-
instructional survey and focus-group interview were used to determine what changes need to be made to the Unit prior to its next implementation as well as areas of focus for future cycles of action research.

**Data Collection Strategy**

To answer the research question and allow for polyangulation, a variety of data were collected for this qualitative action research study (Mertler, 2017). At the beginning of the Unit, before student-participants engaged in any critical media literacy activities, student-participants completed a pretest (Appendix D) and a pre-instruction survey that included Likert-type items as well as open-ended semi-structured interview questions (Appendix M). During the implementation of the Unit, the teacher-researcher conducted classroom observations, and observation notes were recorded using the fieldnotes page (Appendix K) as well as a group observation checklist (Appendix L). The teacher-researcher also recorded reflections and observations for each day’s lesson in a reflective journal. At the conclusion of the Unit, student-participants completed a posttest (Appendix D) and a post-instruction survey that included Likert-type items as well as open-ended semi-structured interview questions (Appendix N). Student-participant responses to these open-ended items were analyzed and coded, and the themes that emerged were used to guide the focus-group interview (Appendix P).

**Ongoing Analysis and Reflection**

An ongoing process of analysis and reflection is vital to action research (Mertler, 2017). As the teacher-researcher, I engaged in constant comparative analysis, documented reflections throughout the data collection period, and established reciprocity by discussing observations and conducting member-checking with my student-
participants throughout the study (Mertler, 2017). In addition to promoting reflexivity, this led to some early modifications to Unit implementation and study design. For example, after administering the pre-instruction survey (Appendix M), I added a three-question Survey Addendum based on a conversation I had with my student-participants. During a lesson on critical thinking, we discussed whether student-participants had previously engaged in conversations about what it means to think critically. While all student-participants in the class indicated they had not had such conversations, Amanda took the point further, likening it to when I talk about rhetorical analysis. I assured her that one of the goals of the Unit was to help her understand rhetorical analysis, and after class I designed the Survey Addendum, which includes three questions relating specifically to student-participants’ perceptions of their understanding of and comfort with the process of rhetorical analysis. We completed this survey at the beginning of class on the second day of instruction, and this became an integral part of the study.

Later in the Unit, I made a minor change to one question on the posttest. In my preliminary analysis of the pretest, I noted many student-participants did not appear to know how to answer the question relating to subtext (“What is the subtext of this message?”). Member-checking confirmed that most student-participants did not know the meaning of subtext, with many of them erroneously assuming it meant subtitle. To ensure student-participants could fully demonstrate their understanding of the text under investigation, I amended the question on the posttest to provide more context (see Appendix D) and incorporated the study of subtext into the Unit. To avoid data contamination, results of this question on the pretest and posttest were analyzed as separate questions and were not compared in data analysis.
Reflective Stance

Reflection was a critical part of my implementation of this Unit. In addition to observational fieldnotes, I kept a reflective journal, which allowed me to reflect after each lesson with each section of the course. This allowed me to reflect critically on my implementation of the Unit throughout the entire process, making adjustments as needed. For each day, the journal, which was maintained digitally, included space to respond to three prompts: what went well, what did not go well/what changes need to be made, and what new problems arise. By responding to what I was observing with my student-participants in my classroom, I was able to make thoughtful adjustments to the Unit and the study continuously.

For example, the first lesson provides an excellent example of how observations and reflection informed both instruction and the study itself. The first lesson included an introduction to media literacy and the Center for Media Literacy’s (2018) Five Core Concepts as well as a discussion of critical thinking and its relevance to media literacy (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012). After class discussion, student-participants were instructed to write personal reflections on how well they perform each of the five practices discussed. In Section A, observations revealed that many student-participants were writing summaries rather than reflections. We took a break from writing to discuss what reflective writing looks like, and when student-participants resumed working, they were far more reflective in their responses. I also noted that this lesson took less time than anticipated, partly because I rushed through the opening in my nervousness, and partly because I had made assumptions about what needed to be explained and discussed. In Section B, I moderated my pacing more carefully and made two changes before student-
participants began writing: We discussed that critical thinking takes time and should not be rushed through, and we discussed the concept of reflective writing in more detail. I observed that student-participants took their time with the assignment, responding more thoughtfully and reflectively to the prompt. The next lesson began with a debriefing session, where I reiterated that student-participants need to take their time with critical thinking and we discussed their experiences with reflective writing.

In that same lesson, I asked student-participants if they recalled ever discussing what critical thinking is in a classroom setting. Three student-participants in Section A and zero student-participants in Section B indicated they recalled such discussions. One student in Section B also commented that she did not understand the concept of critical thinking—just as she did not understand the concept of rhetorical analysis—and that when she is told to do either of these things, she is uncertain of exactly what that means. In reflecting on this, I realized I was missing a key piece of data: student perceptions of and comfort with the skills of rhetorical analysis. As a result, I created a Survey Addendum with three Likert-type questions, which was administered the second day of the Unit. I also added these questions to the post-instructional survey, which was administered at the conclusion of the Unit.

In interim analysis, I reviewed the data that had already been collected, noting emerging themes and discussing them with my student-participants. In particular, we discussed the results of the pre-instructional survey. This occurred shortly after our seminar on stereotypes in media texts, and much of our discussion centered around student responses to the questions relating to diversity and stereotypes in the media. At the end of the Unit, we compared pre- and post-instructional survey responses, and
student-participants quickly noted that the most significant changes had to do with (1) sensitivity to patterns of stereotyping and representation and (2) comfort with the process of rhetorical analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Data for this qualitative action research study came from a variety of instruments. Though similarities in coding strategies are noted here and discussed in further detail in the next section, each data collection instrument required its own method of analysis.

**Primary Data Set**

The pre- and post-instructional surveys were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The Likert-type questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics that included frequency, mean, and standard deviation. These data were then disaggregated by race and gender to note any group differences. The semi-structured interview questions did not need to be typed because they were submitted electronically using Google Forms. Student-participants’ responses to each question were printed and coded using highlighters, sticky notes, a data notebook, and chart paper to record observations and note trends. Coded responses were quantified to note frequency.

The pretest and posttest were analyzed qualitatively. No numerical score was awarded to student-participant responses. The analysis process for both pretest and posttest followed the same procedure. I analyzed questions one at a time, making my way through all student-participant responses before moving on to the next question. Analysis included noting the quality of responses and the number of illustrative details used to support student-participants’ responses. I chose a more holistic approach because grading in AP ELC is more holistic in nature, due in large part to the emphasis on
interpretation and supporting one’s interpretation with evidence from the text under investigation. As with the semi-structured interview questions on the surveys, I analyzed and coded student-participant responses using highlighters, sticky notes, a data notebook, and chart paper to record observations and note trends. Coded responses were quantified to note frequency.

**Secondary Data Set**

Observation data, which included fieldnotes and group discussion checklists, were reviewed and coded, with observations and trends noted in the data notebook. The focus-group interview was video-recorded and transcribed. After student-participants reviewed the transcript, making corrections and clarifications as needed, it was printed, then analyzed and coded using highlighters, sticky notes, a data notebook, and chart paper to record observations and note trends. Coded responses were quantified to note frequency.

**Patterns and Themes**

These data indicate that the Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, promoted the critical reading of media texts, and encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis.

**Coding**

A coding scheme using highlighters and notations was used to record developing patterns (Mertler, 2017; Saldaña, 2016). Transcripts were analyzed line by line, coded and recoded using a variety of methods.
In first-cycle coding, I used combination of concept coding, holistic coding, in vivo coding, and versus coding, often resulting in simultaneous coding (Saldaña, 2016). For example, I used simultaneous coding that included both concept coding and in vivo coding for student-participant responses to the survey question, “In what ways do you think these forms of media (television, film, and advertisements) affect you?” In contrast, I used simultaneous coding that included versus coding and concept coding for the more dichotomous question, “Do you think media representations affect how we view the world and the people within it, including ourselves and others? Explain.” The focus-group interview was coded using a combination of concept coding and in vivo coding, and I used holistic coding for the observations. I used the constant comparative method (Mertler, 2017) to note the patterns and trends that emerged from data analysis.

In second-cycle coding, I used a combination of focused coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). Some of my initial brainstorming was done during the focus-group interview, where I shared the survey results with my student-participants. I later shared and discussed these and other findings with all student-participants in class. After further analysis, I identified preliminary themes and shared my findings with my student-participants as a form of member-checking to verify my interpretations, using their input to further inform my analysis and interpretation process. This process of coding and recoding the data led to the emergence of five core themes (see Tables 4.1-4.5).

Data Interpretation

Data for this qualitative action research study included a variety of qualitative and quantitative data. The findings for each data collection technique are described below.
### Table 4.1

**Overview of Core Theme One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Theme One: The Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics and Target Audience</td>
<td>Pre- and Posttest: Questions 1-2</td>
<td>In the questions pertaining to target audience and supportive evidence, student-participants provided more evidence that was more strongly aligned to their identified target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Likert-Type Questions 16, 19-20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in weighted mean for statements pertaining to target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>In discussion of how the Unit affected how they read, view, and understand their world, five student-participants discussed increased awareness of demographics and target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Six student-participants identified understanding the importance of target audience as one of the most important things they learned in the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Analysis and Interpretations with Evidence</td>
<td>Pre- and Posttest: Questions 2-4</td>
<td>On the posttest, student-participant responses to the questions were longer and included more supportive detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Participant Perceptions about Their Comfort and Confidence with Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Likert-Type Questions 21-25</td>
<td>Increase in weighted mean for statements pertaining to student-participants’ perceptions about their media literacy skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Twenty-four student-participants discussed skills related to media literacy as the most important things they learned in the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student-participants emphasized that the Unit encouraged the critical reading of all texts, which they believe improved their analytical skills in AP ELC and AP U.S. History. At multiple times during the interview, they specifically discussed how the Unit prepared them for the level of analysis required for subsequent unit of study in AP ELC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

Overview of Core Theme Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of the Unit on Student-Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Theme Two: <em>The Unit increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Representation in Media Texts</td>
<td>Pre- and Posttest: Question 3</td>
<td>Increase in number of student-participants who discussed elements related to race, class, and gender in their analysis of techniques used in the advertisement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre- and Posttest: Question 4</td>
<td>Increase in number of student-participants who discussed how the advertisement uses representation of multiple races and positive social messaging to attract customers in their analysis of the purpose of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Semi-Structured Interview Question 2</td>
<td>Increase in number of student-participants who discussed how media affects view of self and other cultures/groups, including discussion of perpetuation of stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 4</td>
<td>In discussion of how the Unit affected how they read, view, and understand their world, seven student-participants specifically discussed increased awareness of stereotypes and representation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Participant Perceptions about Representation and Stereotyping in the Media</td>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Likert-Type Questions 6-9</td>
<td>Increased disagreement with statements relating to whether popular culture texts represent people realistically and whether diversity in the media industry reflects the diversity of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Likert-Type Questions 10-15</td>
<td>Increased agreement with statements relating to the prevalence and impact of gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes in the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 5</td>
<td>Five student-participants identified the awareness of stereotypes as one of the most important things they learned in the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants discussed the role of advertising in perpetuating stereotypes, emphasizing the importance of critically analyzing media texts to decrease susceptibility to those stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3
*Overview of Core Theme Three*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Reading of Entertainment and Informational Media</strong></td>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Likert-Type Questions 3-4</td>
<td>Increase in weighted mean for statements pertaining to whether students critically evaluate media consumed for entertainment and information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>Thirteen student-participants indicated they think more about the impact of media and advertisements in their everyday lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 4</td>
<td>Sixteen student-participants indicated they apply the skills learned in the Unit to their everyday lives, including analyzing advertisements. An additional four student-participants indicated they are now more aware of the prevalence of media in their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 5</td>
<td>Eight student-participants discussed the importance of critically evaluating all forms of media as one of the most important things they learned in the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants indicated they now find themselves more critically viewing entertainment and news media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness of Prevalence and Impact of Advertisements</strong></td>
<td>Pre- and Post-Instruction Surveys: Likert-Type Questions 17-18</td>
<td>Increase in weighted mean for statements pertaining to recognition of various forms of advertisements and awareness of the impact of advertisements in decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants indicated they are more perceptive about various forms of advertisements, particularly product placement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4
Overview of Core Theme Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and Interaction</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>During observation periods, a majority of student-participants were actively engaged (working attentively on assignments; actively listening, viewing, or working; posing questions; verbal responses; nonverbal responses; eye contact; limited off-task behaviors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey:</td>
<td>When discussing their overall opinion of the Unit, five student-participants said they especially enjoyed the collaborative and interactive aspects of the Unit, emphasizing the value of being exposed to the diversity of their peers’ interpretations and perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey:</td>
<td>When discussing the most interesting and useful qualities of the Unit, 15 student-participants discussed the collaborative or interactive aspects. Nine student-participants mentioned class discussion and analysis, four specifically discussed seminars, and two discussed group presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview Question 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants said working and learning in groups was helpful. They also discussed the value of being exposed to the diversity of their peers’ interpretations and perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Participant Perceptions about Their Engagement</td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>Sixteen student-participants described the Unit as fun, interesting, and/or relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants specifically discussed feeling “interested” and “engaged” throughout the Unit. They indicated they felt more engaged during this Unit than they do with typical units of study and found it easier to pay attention because it was interesting and relevant to their lived experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Overview of Core Theme Five

#### Impact of the Unit on Student-Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>In discussing their overall opinion of the Unit, 12 student-participants specifically said they “enjoyed” the Unit, eight said they “loved it” or found it “great,” and six described it as “fun.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 7</td>
<td>In discussing what they found least interesting or useful, 17 student-participants instead emphasized how much they enjoyed the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>In discussing their overall opinion of the Unit, three student-participants specifically said they found the Unit “interesting.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 7</td>
<td>In discussing what they found least interesting or useful, 17 student-participants instead emphasized how much they enjoyed the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>Seven student-participants indicated they found the Unit relatable or relevant to their everyday lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants emphasized the real-world relevance of the Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye-Opening</td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>In discussing their overall opinion of the Unit, 11 student-participants indicated they learned a lot, and an additional six described it as “eye-opening.” Five student-participants discussed the value of being exposed to different interpretations and perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants again described the Unit as “eye-opening,” particularly as related to awareness of stereotypes in the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful in Developing Skills of Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>Post-Instruction Survey: Semi-Structured Interview Question 3</td>
<td>Ten student-participants specifically discussed how the Unit helped them develop media literacy skills, describing it as a fun and easy way to learn how to do media literacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus-Group Interview</td>
<td>Student-participants described the Unit as a “shortcut” for developing media literacy skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data included semi-structured interview questions on the pre-instruction and post-instruction survey, pretest and posttest data, observations, and the focus-group interview. Findings from each method are described below in the order in which these data were collected.

**Pre-instruction survey.** The semi-structured interview questions yielded a wide range of responses that varied widely in length, depth, and perspective. Student-participant responses to the first open-ended response question (“In what ways do you think these forms of media (television, film, and advertisements) affect you?”) varied widely. Some student-participants were dismissive. For example, Abigail responded simply, “They rarely do. I am my own person with my own opinions,” which was what I anticipated would be typical. In contrast, other student-participants responded very personally, such as Brandon, who wrote, “As a POC I believe that media is not always the best at representation, this is supported by how there are often stereotypes and misconceptions. For example, Asian guys are typically viewed as geeky, shy, and effeminate. I don't really view myself as that since I'm not really one to involve in like gaming or the sorts I would much rather watch a TV show with action with some friends.”

Several student-participants displayed criticism of problematic representations in the media, such as Taylor, who responded, “These forms of media affect me in an indirect way, like if there was a movie or show about African American culture and the film/show did a horrible job representing my ethnic group, then not only will I have certain issues with the film/show, but other people will adopt this misinformation and
start to apply this in real life.” I was pleasantly surprised by the insight provided by some student-participants, with their responses suggesting that they were already engaging in the critical analysis of media texts. Overall, student-participants frequently discussed issues related to how the media impacts personal choices and purchasing habits and shapes one’s views of topics and others (see Figure 4.1).

![Frequency Chart: “In what ways do you think these forms of media (television, film, and advertisements) affect you?”](image)

**Figure 4.1**
*Pre-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 1*

The second open-ended response question (“Do you think media representations affect how we view the world and the people within it, including ourselves and others? Explain.”) also elicited a wide range of responses. For example, Kayla responded, “No, not for me. Others may let the media influence how they view others, but I don't change my view on people because nobody is the same,” whereas Taylor responded, “I think the media can negatively and positively affect how I can view the world and the people within it by either encouraging hatred or stereotypes or by shattering stereotypes and making people develop a more accurate understanding for other people and their
differences.” Overall, this range of responses indicates that though student-participants have a broad range of views on how media texts affect them and the way they view the world and the people within it, most student-participants believe media has at least some influence on themselves and others.

Though most responses were generalizations regarding how media representations can impact views, student-participants who were more specific in their responses frequently discussed issues related to how media representations affect views of themselves and others, including many student-participants discussing the prevalence and danger of stereotypes in the media and the media’s ability to inform and affect views of people and places different from them (see Figure 4.2). Two student-participants responded that media representations affect other people but not themselves, and one student-participant responded that media representations do not affect anyone’s views of the world.

---

**Figure 4.2**

*Pre-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 2*
Pretest. To establish a baseline for performance, student-participants took a pretest before the Unit began. Two student-participants were absent but took the pretest upon their return to school. The pretest (Appendix D), adapted by an instrument designed by and used with permission from Renee Hobbs (2007; personal communication, February 12, 2017), consisted of five open-ended questions relating to audience, creative techniques, purpose, and subtext. Student-participants completed the pretest using a printed copy of both the pretest and the advertisement (Appendix D). Overall, student-participant responses tended to be rather brief and included little evidence for their analytical claims. This is much in line with what I would expect at this point in the school year.

The first two questions of the pretest relate to the concept of target audience. In response to the first question (“Who is the target audience for this message?”), responses were extremely varied. Some student-participants identified a very limited target audience, whereas others identified a very broad target audience. Fifteen student-participants limited all categories, and two student-participants limited no categories. The second question (“What visual information in the ad supports your answer?”) yields more useful data. Overall, student-participants pointed out details related to the gender, race, age, and apparent social class of the models depicted in the advertisement, with five student-participants appearing to limit the target audience to the demographics of the models themselves. Student-participant responses were quantified by counting how many supportive details from the advertisement were used to justify their identified target audience. Twenty-one student-participants included four or more supportive details, two included three or more supportive details, eight included two or more supportive details,
and six included one supportive detail. Some student-participants included many details with little to no explanation, and other student participants included few details but more developed explanations. Generally, the evidence matched the identified target audience.

The third question (“What techniques are used to attract and hold viewers’ attention?”) relates more specifically to creative techniques and rhetorical choices. Overall, there were many general descriptions of the scene with few concrete details to support student-participants’ interpretation. Those who did provide concrete details in support discussed elements related to the written text (e.g., font type, size, and color; specific word choice) as well as visual elements (e.g., contrast, placement of elements, the tableau depicted). One student-participant commented on the connection between the gold font and the Golden Rule. Student-participant responses were quantified by counting how many techniques or supportive details from the advertisement were included. Four student-participants cited five or more specific techniques or details, five cited four specific techniques or details, 10 cited three specific techniques or details, 11 cited two specific techniques or details, seven cited one specific technique or detail, and one cited no specific techniques or details.

The fourth question (“What is the purpose of the message?”) elicited a wider range of responses than I anticipated. As this is an advertisement, I anticipated nearly all students would identify the purpose as persuasion. After responses were categorized and quantified, 17 student-participants indicated the purpose was to advertise or persuade consumers to stay at their hotel, including 14 responses that discussed how the use of the Golden Rule would help them attract consumers; ten student-participants indicated the purpose was to promote the Golden Rule or other life lessons; eight student-participants
indicated the purpose was to inform the public about the friendliness of the staff or the company’s ethos; two student-participants indicated the purpose was to show unity and the power of women; and one student-participant indicated the purpose was to make minorities feel welcome. As texts can serve multiple purposes, I did not find any of these inappropriate; however, I was surprised more students did not connect the purpose of the advertisement with the purpose of advertising: to persuade the consumer to purchase a product or service.

The final question (“What is the subtext of the message?”) relates to what is implied in the advertisement. Generally, responses were brief and limited to discussion of the Golden Rule and the apparent friendliness of hotel staff. Eight student-participants cited small text as subtext, suggesting they were confusing subtitles with subtext. Still others discussed purpose (to get people to stay at the hotel) rather than subtext. Member-checking after the pretest verified many students did not know what subtext was. This question was the most difficult to analyze, and I believe this is because many student-participants did not understand the question. As a result, the question was changed for the posttest to include “What values are embedded in this message?” As this change compromised the validity of this question on the posttest, differences between pretest and the posttest were not examined for this question.

Observations. I completed observations throughout the Unit, using a variety of tools. Though I began taking observational fieldnotes with an open-format Fieldnotes Page (Appendix K), I found the Group Discussion Checklist (GDC) (Appendix L) more useful when student-participants were working in groups. As a full participant in the study, I found that the checklist allowed me to better balance my roles of teacher and
researcher. Not only did it allow for a more focused and streamlined approach to notetaking, but it also allowed me to circulate the room more freely. I noticed that the act of taking notes in the proximity of a group also appeared to get and keep student-participants on task. Though this made notetaking a good classroom management tool, it may also have skewed my data by impacting student-participant behavior. To minimize the impact, I frequently walked around with a clipboard and pen, taking notes, in an attempt to help my student-participants become comfortable with the practice.

*Stereotypes seminar.* Early in the Unit, we had a Socratic seminar discussing stereotypes in the media. In this discussion, some student-participants were very engaged and involved, whereas others appeared engaged but remained quiet. Discussion included numerous stereotypes including those related to gender, race, ethnicity, ability, and mental illness, but when discussion turned toward racial stereotypes in the media, many White students became visibly uncomfortable. To better inform my interpretation of these behaviors and to get all student-participants’ perspectives, I added a personal reflection component.

For homework, each student-participant wrote a one-page personal reflection about the seminar, and at the beginning of the next class, they completed a brief online questionnaire with two semi-structured interview questions: (1) “Describe your experience in yesterday’s discussion. How did it make you feel? Why do you think that is?” and (2) “Do you think it’s important for us to examine issues relating to stereotypes? Why or why not?” After coding, the first question yielded the following insights regarding student-participants’ experiences during this discussion: seventeen student-participants reported feeling enlightened, with two students indicating they felt
enlightened despite feeling uncomfortable; fourteen student-participants felt the variety of perspectives present(ed) added to the richness of discussion; five student-participants indicated they felt heard or liberated; five student-participants were uncomfortable with discussions of racial stereotyping; four student-participants were uncomfortable with White student-participants’ responses to discussions of racial stereotyping; and three student-participants were inspired to work for change. The second question was coded more categorically, with 37 students indicating they felt such examinations are valuable and one student indicating a feeling of indifference.

Magazine analysis. Later in the Unit, during the magazine analysis lesson, I conducted observations using the Group Discussion Checklist (GDC). This lesson spanned four days and required substantial preparation. To prepare materials, I selected a variety of magazines with different target demographics and removed all content from the magazines, leaving only the cover, the table of contents, and the advertisements themselves. Each magazine was then re-bound using sheet protectors and loose-leaf rings. This process took me approximately 20 hours, as I made more magazine packages than students to promote diverse perspectives and to ensure all student-participants would have several magazines from which to choose (see Appendix H). Though the construction process admittedly took far more time than I anticipated, I felt it was valuable in keeping students focused on the advertisements, removing objectionable material, and emphasizing how many advertisements are in magazines.

On the first day of magazine analysis, student-participants selected a magazine and worked individually, taking analytical notes using a simple graphic organizer (Appendix I). On the second day of magazine analysis, students worked in small groups,
exchanged magazines with someone in their group, and took analytical notes using the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018; see Appendix G). Student-participants familiarized themselves with their new magazines for twenty minutes before transitioning to group discussion. In their small groups, students selected one advertisement from each magazine, analyzed it using the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018), and presented their analysis to the class. When transitioning from individual to group work, some groups engaged in social talk; however, once they got started, student-participants were attentive and actively engaged, with some groups looking up outside information about publishers and corporations to further inform their analysis. The student-participants appeared to like using the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018). Overall, critical analysis was quite impressive, with many student-participants examining issues relating to representation (see Appendix G, Key Questions #3-5).

**Commercial analysis.** The GDC was also used during commercial analysis. In this lesson, student-participants worked in small groups, selecting a recent Super Bowl commercial for analysis using *USA Today’s* (2018) Ad Meter results and the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018). When some groups experienced difficulties accessing some commercials due to the district’s filtering software, I created a YouTube playlist with most of the commercials from the article. During this activity, more student-participants were off-task than during other observations, frequently watching other commercials and other YouTube videos rather than engaging in analysis. Though this lesson required much more monitoring to encourage some student-participants to stay on task, most student-participants were engaged and enthusiastic.
When groups presented their analysis to the class, the level of focus became apparent, with groups that were off-task having notably more superficial analysis.

Posttest. At the conclusion of the Unit, student-participants took a posttest. One student-participant was absent and never completed the posttest. Like the pretest, the posttest (Appendix D) was adapted by an instrument designed by and used with permission from Renee Hobbs (2007; personal communication, February 12, 2017). It consisted of five open-ended questions relating to audience, creative techniques, purpose, and subtext. Student-participants completed the posttest using a printed copy of both the posttest and the advertisement (Appendix D). Overall, student-participant responses were much more detailed and developed than on the pretest, suggesting greater attention to detail and more developed rhetorical analysis skills.

The first two questions of the posttest relate to the concept of target audience. In response to the first question (“Who is the target audience for this message?”), responses were varied. Some student-participants identified a very limited target audience, whereas others identified a very broad target audience. Fifteen student-participants limited all categories, and one student-participant limited no categories. As with the pretest, the second question (“What visual information in the ad supports your answer?”) yielded more useful data. Though there were varying interpretations of the advertisement, the evidence provided reflected the identified target audience as well as the student-participant’s interpretation. Overall, students-participants pointed out details related to the gender, race, age, and apparent social class of the models depicted in the advertisement, with five student-participants appearing to limit the target audience to the
demographics of the models themselves. Several student-participants also discussed the setting for the advertisement, discussing issues such as costliness and social class.

Student-participant responses were quantified by counting how many supportive details from the advertisement were used to justify their identified target audience. Twenty-five student-participants included four or more supportive details (an increase of 13%), two included three or more supportive details (an increase of 17%), eight included two or more supportive details (a decrease of 13%), and six included only one supportive detail (a decrease of 13%). Some student-participants included many details with little to no explanation, and other student-participants included few details but more developed explanations. Overall, student-participant responses were much richer and more detailed on the posttest than the pretest.

The third question ("What techniques are used to attract and hold viewers’ attention?") relates more specifically to creative techniques and rhetorical choices. Overall, student-participant responses were developed with multiple concrete details to support their interpretation. Student-participants discussed elements related to the written text (e.g., font type, size, and color; specific word choice) as well as visual elements (e.g., contrast, placement of elements, the tableau depicted). Three student-participants commented on the connection between the gold font and the Golden Rule. Student-participant responses were quantified by counting how many techniques or supportive details from the advertisement were included. Twenty-four student-participants cited five or more specific techniques or details (an increase of 40%), seven cited four specific techniques or details (an increase of 6%), five cited three specific techniques or details (a decrease of 12%), five cited two specific techniques or details (a decrease of 15%), one
cited one specific technique or detail (a decrease of 15%), and zero student-participants cited no specific techniques or details (a decrease of 3%). Many student-participants cited specific techniques examined in the Unit, and responses overall were more detailed and perceptive than on the pretest.

The fourth question (“What is the purpose of the message?”) continued to elicit a wide range of responses, which I expected based on the pretest. After responses were categorized and quantified, 31 student-participants indicated the purpose was to advertise or persuade consumers to stay at their hotel (an increase of 39%), including 14 responses that discussed how the use of the Golden Rule would help them attract consumers; five student-participants indicated the purpose was to inform the public about the friendliness of the staff or the company’s ethos (a decrease of 7%); and one student-participant indicated the purpose was to promote the Golden Rule or other life lessons (a decrease of 23%). I was happy to see that more student-participants connected the purpose of the advertisement with the purpose of advertising while also looking at the strategies being used to attract potential customers.

The final question (“What is the subtext of the message? What values are embedded in this message?”) relates to what is implied in the advertisement. As with the rest of the posttest, responses to this question were well-developed. Discussion included discussion of the Golden Rule (twenty responses), the promotion of equality and non-discrimination (nine responses), and values such as kindness (eleven responses), respect (nine responses), and hospitality/customer service (eight responses). Though five student-participants cited small text as subtext, their explanations also spoke to the values suggested in the advertisement. Overall, responses were well-developed, and student-
participants included specific details from the advertisement to support their interpretations. As I stated in the discussion of the pretest, this question was changed from its version on the pretest, with “What values are embedded in this message?” added to ensure students understood what the question was asking. As this change compromised the validity of this question for the posttest, differences between pretest and the posttest were not examined for this question, and it was not included in the final data set used for polyangulation.

Post-instructional survey semi-structured interview questions. As with the pre-instructional survey, the semi-structured interview questions yielded a wide range of responses that varied in length, depth, and perspective. The questions were as follows:

- Q1: In what ways do you think these forms of media (television, film, and advertisements) affect you?
- Q2: Do you think media representations affect how we view the world and the people within it, including ourselves and others? Explain.

Student-participant responses to Q1 varied widely, though several trends emerged. Student-participants frequently discussed issues related to how the media perpetuates stereotypes, impacts personal choices and purchasing habits, and shapes views of topics, others, and oneself (see Figure 4.3).

Student-participant responses to Q2 showed more consensus (all student-participants essentially responding “yes”), their reasoning and explanation varied. Though many responses were generalizations regarding how media representations can impact views, student-participants who were more specific in their responses frequently discussed issues related to how media representations affect views of themselves and
Figure 4.3

*Frequency Chart: Post-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 1*

others, including many student-participants discussing the prevalence and danger of stereotypes in the media (see Figure 4.4). Notably, the views of the two student-participants who responded that media representations affect other people but not themselves and the one student-participant who responded that media representations do not affect anyone’s views changed, with all 38 students indicating that they believe media representations affect people’s views of the world and the people within it, albeit to varying degrees.

Compared to the pre-instructional survey, student-participant responses in the post-instructional survey showed additional trends. Responses were often more detailed, including supportive examples, and they were often longer in length. Student-participants also showed more sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping in the media as well as evidence of cultural criticism and social consciousness that extended
Figure 4.4

*Frequency Chart: Post-Instruction Survey Semi-Structured Interview Question 2*

Beyond the scope of our examination in class. For example, in discussing the prevalence of stereotypes in his response to Q1, Jacob responded, “Muslims are portrayed as terrorists due to the attacks on the United States. This stereotype causes me and others to believe that anyone wearing a turban should be feared.” In contrast, other students commented on how representation can challenge stereotypes. In response to Q2, Olivia wrote, “Shows like ‘Hilda’ on Netflix can express diversity by having Muslim and Black female leads in the show. Doing this allows people to have more positive views of people of color rather than the negative ones most shows express.” Other students responded more personally about the impact of stereotypes in the media. For example, in response to Q1, Andrew responded, “Television, film, and advertising often warp viewers’ conceptions of people like myself (African-American males), which directly correlates to the way people expect me to behave, think, speak, and/or perform academically.”
The impact of the Unit was evident in many student-participant responses. Quite pointedly, Alexis responded to Q2 with the following:

Advertising and media heavily affect how we see the world, whether it decides for us how things should be or how things should NOT be. Advertising could either let representation be detrimental to the consumer or embrace that diversity in order to appeal to audiences. I’ve seen many examples of both throughout this unit. I have witnessed a person’s individuality and diversity be represented as something shameful in order to make them feel as if the product is necessary to “correct” themselves, but I have also seen many more positive correlations within media as well as to who we are as individuals and how we should embrace these attributes. I am happy to see the common theme of risking the consumer’s feelings for profit begin to wither away.

These student-participant responses suggest that students are consuming various forms of media with a critical lens.

**Additional questions.** In addition to the two questions that were on the pre-instructional survey, the post-instructional survey included several questions related to student-participants’ perceptions of the Unit. These questions are as follows:

- Q3: What’s your overall opinion of the Unit?
- Q4: Do you think the Unit has affected how you read, view, or understand your world?
- Q5: What activities, lessons, or strategies did you find MOST interesting or useful?
• Q6: What activities, lessons, or strategies did you find LEAST interesting or useful?

Student-participant perceptions of the Unit were overwhelmingly positive. In response to Q3, student-participants said they enjoyed the Unit, with the word “enjoyed” appearing in 11 responses and the word “loved” appearing in seven. Eleven student-participants discussed how much they learned in the Unit, and 10 specifically discussed how it helped them develop their media and media literacy skills. For example, Amanda said, “I loved this unit, I think it was a great way to teach rhetorical analysis in a way that made it fun and easy…. I enjoyed this unit thoroughly, and I think you should continue to teach it.” Six student-participants described the Unit as eye-opening, six described it as helpful, and seven described it as relatable and relevant to their everyday lives. For example, Kayla responded, “I believe that the unit did not only teach me rhetorical analysis, but it gave me a different outlook on life. I never realized how manipulative media was.” Five student-participants said they valued the interactivity of the unit and the exposure to a variety of perspectives and interpretations. Thirteen student-participants indicated they think more about media and advertisements as a result of the Unit, applying what they learned to their lived experiences.

In their responses to Q4, all student-participants indicated the Unit changed the way they interact with their world. Sixteen students discussed how they apply the lessons learned to their real lives by analyzing advertisements and other media texts more critically, with nine student-participants indicating they recognize techniques and strategies used by advertisers and other text creators. For example, Brianna responded “This unit has affected my understanding of the world in more ways than I thought it
would. I now find myself recognizing strategies used by companies and advertisers and am more apt to find their faults.” Similarly, Hannah responded, “The unit has definitely opened my eyes to the immense presence of media influence.”

Other students discussed issues related to representation and stereotyping, such as Megan, who said the Unit “definitely” affected how she reads her world, noting, “I can easily spot the techniques that advertisers use to attract consumers and see through the facade of their advertising. I know that what I see is not necessarily true or an accurate representation of people or a product.” Alexis appeared to have found inspiration in the Unit: When discussing the impact of stereotypes in the media, she said,

This unit has broadened my view of the world and how the media not only affects myself but those around me. I was able to hear so many perspectives from my classmates, some that genuinely impacted me and helped me realize what I could do to change certain stigmas created by stereotypes or expectations in advertising and media.

As these responses suggest, the Unit made an impact on these student-participants. As the teacher-researcher, I found these responses incredibly insightful and encouraging.

In their responses to Q5, student-participants indicated that they found rhetorical analysis skills to be most important. Fourteen said they found learning about advertising strategies and rhetorical techniques most helpful, and ten more generally discussed learning how to analyze advertisements. Five student-participants mentioned the importance of target audience, and eight discussed the importance of critically evaluating all forms of media texts. Bringing multiple aspects of this together, Samantha responded with the following:
I believe the most important things I've learned from this unit is the real-life applicability aspects of the unit. This includes rhetorical analysis of advertisements to find the true intent and/or the messages they send. I also value knowing how advertisements work, like how they appeal to their targeted audiences and how nothing is accidental. It has allowed me to look at advertisements and media in a completely new light.

Though most student-participants discussed skills related to rhetorical and critical analysis, Sarah found social skills to be the most valuable: “The most important thing that I have learned from this is to never judge someone for the way they look or the way they dress. Also, to not stereotype someone by the way that you view them.” This is particularly notable, as this student-participant was one who became uncomfortable during the stereotypes seminar when the discussion turned to racial stereotypes in the media.

In their responses to Q6, student-participants discussed what they found most interesting or useful in the Unit. Though responses were varied, the greatest number of student-participants (nine) discussed how helpful and interesting they found whole-class analysis and discussion, with several citing the exposure to different perspectives and interpretations as being particularly valuable. Similarly, four student-participants discussed the seminars. Four student-participants said they found the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018) particularly helpful in developing analytical skills. Six student-participants said they most enjoyed analyzing commercials, with four referred specifically to the lesson analyzing the cell phone commercial (adapted from Baker, 2016).
In their responses to the final question, Q7, student-participants discussed what they found least interesting or useful in the Unit. Not surprisingly, the greatest number of student-participants (six) found the rhetorical analysis essay to be the least interesting. For example, Amanda responded, “The actual analysis itself, though it was cool to break the ad down and get a better understanding of it, it was more fun to have hands-on, in class discussions about the different adverts.” In contrast to Q6, three student-participants indicated they found the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018) least helpful, with Andrew describing it as “helpful but not very interesting” and Jacob describing it as “useful by giving a guideline to the viewer” while also “constricting when having to focus on strictly the card.” This suggests students may not have fully comprehended the broad application of the tool’s Key Questions. Fifty percent of student-participants, however, indicated they found the entire Unit interesting and useful.

**Focus-group interview.** The focus-group interview (FGI) took place more than two weeks after the conclusion of the Unit. This gap in time was due in part to school holidays and scheduling challenges. The FGI took place after school. To determine availability and scheduling, student-participants completed a brief questionnaire using Google Forms, which asked if they were available for an hour after school and asked them to rate their interest in participating. Though I had planned to use additional selection criteria, the limited number of student-participants who had after-school availability and expressed a high interest in participating (a “4” or “5” on a five-point scale) reduced the pool of student-participants to twelve. Thus, I invited all twelve, and of the twelve invited, ten participated in the FGI.
The focus-group interview was an open-ended interview (Mertler, 2017) that consisted of very few very broad questions. Student-participant responses to the opening question (“What did you think of the Unit?”) guided the remainder of the interview. Overall, student-participants indicated they found the Unit practical, informative, engaging, and enjoyable. They said they are more observant and critical of the media they consume, especially advertisements, television shows, and news. Student-participants emphasized the real-world relevance and application of the Unit, such as Tyler, who said, “[Y]ou definitely apply these skills to real life,” and Amanda, who said, “I feel like in a lot of classes that we take, like, everything that we learn you really can’t use past college, or even sometimes not even in college. And I feel like that unit was very useful.” Such responses suggest the student-participants saw the Unit as valuable to their everyday lives within and beyond the classroom walls.

Student-participants said they found the Unit engaging and helpful. They also discussed the value of being exposed to different interpretations and perspectives. For example, in the following exchange, student-participants discuss the value of the Unit:

Ashley: It was very, like, um, what’s the word? Not interesting, but it made me want to…not that I don’t want to normally pay attention…but it made me…it was very easy to pay attention to. This unit was, it was very easy to focus on. [Other students nodding in agreement.]

Tyler: It was very engaging.

Ashley: That’s the word!

Sydney: I liked it more than I did the lessons, like, previous.
Amanda: I definitely liked it more because, like, I felt more engaged, but then also, like, if I didn’t see something and someone else saw it, it gave me a different perspective on it. So I liked being able to hear what the rest of the class thought because, I mean, one person can’t see every single thing in the advertisement, so it helps to get other people’s view on it.

Jasmine: Different interpretations of it helped, too.

Nicholas: Yeah, I liked that there was multiple ways to see every advertisement.

Amanda: I’ve always kind of felt like learning in groups instead of just, like, one-on-one is a lot more helpful. At least for me because I’m very, like, a hands-on and visual learner, I’m not an auditory learner. So I liked that about the unit.

Andrew: And I think that the unit, the one that we’re discussing, really provided us with a lot of preparation for analyzing the jeremiads that we’re working on right now. I don’t think that I would’ve really been able to appropriately and rhetorically analyze a jeremiad the way I am now had I not learned the things that I learned in this unit. So it was very helpful.

Jasmine: I heard that!

Later in their discussion, student-participants discussed several activities and assignments that they found particularly helpful or insightful, including the TED Talks, group analysis and presentations, seminars, class discussions and analysis, the Ad Scavenger Hunt assignment (Appendix E) counter-advertisements (Appendix F), and the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018; see Appendix G). In the following dialogue,
student-participants discuss their perspectives on the presentations and counter-advertisements:

**Jasmine:** I really liked the presentations, too. In my class, I think a lot of people were spot on on stuff. Hearing different interpretations of what others got from the ad that I 100% agreed with or never thought about.

**Andrew:** And even with the counter-advertisement we were required to do, I think that was also very informative because we could almost see, like, a side-by-side comparison of what the advertisement was and what it could have been if the creator was looking at the issue from another lens. I really enjoyed that assignment.

**Ashley:** I definitely did, too. I thought that was really cool.

**Nicholas:** And it gave us more time to actually analyze it ourselves.

**Ashley:** And it was cool because you were almost like the ad creator, like you were the one making the rhetorical choices of *oh, I should put this here because it would line up with the z-line or that color doesn’t look good but this color would draw more attention.* It kind of gave us a different perspective on how they make ads.

We discussed the pre- and post-instructional survey results, which were later shared and discussed with all student-participants. When discussing the questions regarding the impact of media and sensitivity to patterns of stereotyping and representation, student-participants elaborated on their responses, with many student-participants indicating they felt the Unit was eye-opening. As with the survey, student-
participants emphasized the value of being exposed to different perspectives and interpretations. For example, Andrew offered the following insight:

I think that advertising does play a major role in how we view other people, especially people who are different than we are. And I think because the media is such a central part of our lives, we often take what the media says to be the hear all be all, or the end all be all, and we don’t really take the initiative to change our paradigm and look at things on a different perspective.

This discussion also led to the following exchange regarding the value of investigating patterns of stereotyping and representation in media texts:

**Samantha:** I think the correlation between the stereotypes and advertising is good because if you recognize that, then you’re less susceptible to, like, retain those stereotypes. Cause I think it comes to a point where media adds to the stereotypes, it becomes dangerous, so I think this unit really helped me in, like, recognizing that and understanding that that’s not the truth.

**Ashley:** Understanding that it’s a stereotype.

**Tyler:** For me, with the stereotypes, the more that we studied them, like, it became, I guess I could see there’s a whole lot more stereotypes, like, out there in advertising that we were exposed to and how much that affects us. We’ve already touched on how it affects us, but there’s just a bunch of stereotypes out there. That opened up my eyes.

I found these responses incredibly insightful and somewhat surprising. Though the examination of stereotypes and representation was only a small part of the Unit, it clearly had a lasting and significant impact on my student-participants.
Student-participants discussed the Unit’s role in developing their rhetorical analysis skills. For example, Andrew said, “I didn’t know that there were so many ways that you could rhetorically analyze an advertisement. And it also taught me about the different methods that advertising companies use to convey their messages.” Several student-participants talked specifically about how it informed their analysis in the subsequent unit in AP ELC. For example, in the following exchange, student-participants describe visual and media analysis as a “shortcut” to more traditional text analysis:

Nicholas: …[W]hen we would analyze the advertisements, we would have to, a lot of times there wouldn’t be a lot of words on them, and we would analyze them and develop our own paragraphs talking about them, and now that we’re doing actual text, it’s almost like a shortcut cause we have more to base it off of. Do you get what I’m saying?

Teacher-Researcher: What do you feel is the shortcut?

Nicholas: That there’s more information.

Ashley: I know what you’re saying.

Nicholas: It started…like it was…it seemed like it was easier with the advertisements because there was pictures, I guess, but now that we actually have entire texts, it’s almost like a shortcut because there’s more to analyze.

Ashley: It’s like, because we learned it—I understand what he’s saying—we learned it first visually almost, like first real grasping of the concept of rhetorical analysis. We learned it visually with, like, the ads, that now it’s
easier when we have like whole paragraphs to analyze. Cause before we were analyzing the color of her shirt could mean this and it’s just, like, more far-fetched, like you have to make bigger stretches. But now that we’ve brought it back to whole paragraphs, it feels so much easier because there’s so much you can actually go off of. There’s more evidence, too.

I was very pleasantly surprised by responses such as these because they indicated student-participants not only felt the Unit was useful; they felt the skills within the Unit transferred to other contexts. This aligns extremely well with my intention to create another access point to the difficult skill of media literacy. Relatedly, student-participants also discussed how the skills acquired in the Unit help them in other courses, particularly with the document-based question in their AP U.S. History class.

**Quantitative Data**

Student-participants completed pre-instructional and post-instructional surveys, each containing 25 Likert-type questions. Before analyzing these data thematically, I performed descriptive statistical analysis. For calculations of central tendency and distribution, each response was given a weighted point value: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral or Uncertain (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). Though there is some disagreement about whether to use parametric statistics with ordinal data such as Likert-type responses items, Norman (2010) argues that parametric methods are robust and appropriate to use “with Likert data, with small sample sizes, with unequal variances, and with non-normal distributions, with no fear of ‘coming to the wrong conclusion’” (p. 631). Frequency, weighted mean, and standard deviation were calculated using Excel software (see Tables 4.6-4.13).
Each survey prompt was related to one of four categories: perceptions about media (questions 1-5), media effects (questions 14-15, 18, 22), representation and patterns of stereotyping (questions 6-13), and the skills of media literacy (questions 16-17, 19-21, 23-25). As the teacher-researcher, I conducted descriptive statistical analysis on the Likert-type response scales before analyzing them thematically.

In my initial analysis of the pre-instruction survey, I was surprised to find that 81.6% of student-participants marked either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statement “Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.” I was also surprised by how many student-participants marked either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statements regarding the prevalence of gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes in television and film (81.6% and 86.8%, respectively). Student-participants also seemed to have some awareness of representational issues both on-screen and behind the scenes, with 57.9% of student-participants marking “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to the statement that on-screen diversity roughly matches the diversity in the United States (compared to 23.7% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” and 18.4% “Neutral or Unsure”), and 39.5% of student-participants marking "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" to the statement that behind-the-scenes diversity roughly matches the diversity in the United States (compared to 21% “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” and 39.5% “Neutral or Unsure”). These findings, which suggest student-participants think they have some understanding of media and advertising, made me very intrigued to see how student-participants respond to the portions of the Unit that relate directly to media representation. See Table 4.6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Prompt</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral/Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>19 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within the United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors,</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>11 (28.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>24 (63.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>12 (31.6%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>19 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>27 (71.1%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In my initial analysis of the post-instructional survey, I noticed consensus emerging with some of the statements. To further examine these developing themes, I combined these data into two categories: “Strongly Disagree/Disagree” and “Strongly Agree/Agree” (see Table 4.6). For example, 100% of student-participants responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statements “Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes” (+18% compared to the pre-instructional survey), “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” (+18%), “Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences” (+3%), and “Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it” (+18%). Other statements came to near-consensus, here being defined as 85% or higher: 97% of student-participants responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statements “The goal of entertainment media is to make money” (+24%), “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” (+11%), and “I understand how target audience affects content” (+21%); 95% of student-participants responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statements “The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences” (+3%), “I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts” (+26%), and “I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis” (+16%); 89% of student-participants responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statement “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (+34%) and “I understand how to do rhetorical analysis” (+39%); and 87% of student-participants responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statement “The purpose of the media is to deliver audiences to advertisers” (+29%).

Trending in the opposite direction, 92% of student-participants responded either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to the statement “Popular culture texts, including
television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically” (+24%) and 89% of student-participants responded either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to the statement “Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically” (+32%).

Other notable differences, here defined as a change of 10% or more, include the following: the number of student-participants who responded either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to the statements “I critically evaluate the media I consume for information” and “Media depictions often challenge stereotypes” decreased by 11%; the number of student-participants who responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statement “On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity in the United States” decreased by 16%; the number of student-participants who responded either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to the statement “Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States” increased by 18%; the number of student-participants who responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statements “I critically evaluate the media I consume for information” and “Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself” increased by 13%; the number of student-participants who responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statements “Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself” and “Advertising affects the choices I make” increased by 21%; and the number of student-participants who responded either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the statement “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” increased by 50%. These findings indicate that student-
participants’ perceptions regarding both the media and the process of rhetorical analysis changed over the course of the Unit. See Tables 4.7-4.8 below.

An examination of the differences in central tendency yields additional insights. Two statements showed a change in weighted mean in excess of one point on the five-point scale: “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (from 3.34 to 4.39, change 1.05) and “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” (from 3.08 to 4.16, change 1.08). Three statements showed a change of 0.70-0.99: “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 4.00 to 4.92, change 0.92), “I understand how to do rhetorical analysis” (from 3.45 to 4.29, change 0.84), and “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 4.08 to 4.82, change 0.74). An additional 10 statements showed a change of 0.50-0.69: “Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically” (from 2.54 to 1.87, change 0.67), “Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes” (from 4.13 to 4.79, change 0.66), “I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis” (from 3.82 to 4.42, change 0.60), “The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers” (from 3.58 to 4.16, change 0.58), “Advertising affects the choices I make” (from 2.79 to 3.37, change 0.58), “I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts” (from 3.74 to 4.32, change 0.58), “The goal of entertainment media is to make money” (from 4.05 to 4.61, change 0.56), “Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it” (from 4.11 to 4.66, change 0.55), “Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically” (from 2.53 to 1.87, change 0.66), and “Advertisements
Table 4.7
Frequency Distribution for All Students’ Results from the Post-Instruction Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Prompt</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral/Uncertain</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>11 (28.9%)</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>20 (52.6%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>24 (63.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do</td>
<td>17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do</td>
<td>12 (31.6%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>11 (28.9%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within the United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors,</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>30 (78.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>11 (28.9%)</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>35 (92.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>32 (84.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>4 (10.5%)</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>19 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>32 (84.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>2 (5.3%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>21 (55.3%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>19 (50%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>14 (36.8%)</td>
<td>20 (52.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>13 (34.2%)</td>
<td>25 (65.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>19 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>15 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8
Changes in Frequency Distribution from Pre- to Post-Instructional Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Instructional Survey</th>
<th>Post-Instructional Survey</th>
<th>Difference from Pre- to Post-Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 35 (92.1%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 36 (94.7%) +1 (+2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>SD/D 3 (7.9%) SA/A 22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>SD/D 4 (10.5%) SA/A 33 (86.8%) +1 (2.6%) +11 (+28.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>SD/D 23 (60.5%) SA/A 5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>SD/D 22 (57.9%) SA/A 9 (-10.5%) -1 (-2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>SD/D 13 (32.9%) SA/A 24 (63.2%)</td>
<td>SD/D 3 (7.9%) SA/A 29 (76.3%) -2 (-5.3%) +5 (+13.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>SD/D 7 (17.9%) SA/A 28 (73.7%)</td>
<td>SD/D 0 (0%) SA/A 37 (97.4%) -3 (-7.9%) +9 (+23.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td>SD/D 68.4% SA/A 5 (13.2%)</td>
<td>SD/D 35 (92.1%) SA/A 1 (2.6%) +9 (+23.7%) -4 (-10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td>SD/D 57.9% SA/A 8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>SD/D 34 (89.5%) SA/A 3 (7.9%) +12 (+31.6%) -5 (-13.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>SD/D 57.9% SA/A 9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>SD/D 24 (63.2%) SA/A 3 (7.9%) +2 (+5.3%) -6 (-15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>SD/D 39.5% SA/A 8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>SD/D 22 (57.9%) SA/A 3 (7.9%) +7 (+18.4%) -5 (-13.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>SD/D 2 (2.6%) SA/A 31 (81.6%)</td>
<td>SD/D 0 (0%) SA/A 38 (100%) -1 (-2.6%) +7 (+18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>SD/D 28.9% SA/A 18 (47.4%)</td>
<td>SD/D 7 (18.4%) SA/A 20 (52.6%) -4 (-10.5%) +2 (+5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>SD/D 5.3% SA/A 31 (81.6%)</td>
<td>SD/D 0 (0%) SA/A 38 (100%) -2 (-5.3%) +7 (+18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>SD/D 7.9% SA/A 33 (86.8%)</td>
<td>SD/D 0 (0%) SA/A 37 (97.4%) -3 (-7.9%) +4 (+10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>SD/D 31.6% SA/A 16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>SD/D 9 (23.7%) SA/A 21 (55.3%) -3 (-7.9%) +5 (+13.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>SD/D 21.1% SA/A 17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>SD/D 4 (10.5%) SA/A 25 (65.8%) -4 (-10.5%) +8 (+21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>SD/D 0% SA/A 37 (97.4%)</td>
<td>SD/D 0 (0%) SA/A 38 (100%) +1 (+2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td>SD/D 5.3% SA/A 24 (63.2%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 32 (84.2%) -1 (-2.6%) +8 (+21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>SD/D 34.2% SA/A 10 (26.3%)</td>
<td>SD/D 10 (26.3%) SA/A 18 (47.4%) -3 (-7.9%) +8 (+21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>SD/D 5.3% SA/A 26 (68.4%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 36 (94.7%) -1 (-2.6%) +10 (+26.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>SD/D 0% SA/A 29 (76.3%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 37 (97.4%) +1 (+2.6%) +8 (+21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>SD/D 21.1% SA/A 21 (55.3%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 34 (89.5%) -7 (-18.4%) +13 (+34.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>SD/D 10.5% SA/A 31 (81.6%)</td>
<td>SD/D 0 (0%) SA/A 38 (100%) -4 (-10.5%) +7 (+18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>SD/D 7.9% SA/A 30 (78.9%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 36 (94.7%) -2 (-5.3%) +6 (+15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>SD/D 7.9% SA/A 19 (50%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 34 (89.5%) -2 (-5.3%) +15 (+39.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>SD/D 23.7% SA/A 12 (31.6%)</td>
<td>SD/D 1 (2.6%) SA/A 31 (81.6%) -8 (-21.1%) +19 (+50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Difference calculated as “post” minus “pre.” Does not include Neutral/Uncertain responses.
use strategies to target specific audiences” (from 3.18 to 3.68, change 0.50). Taken together, these changes suggest an increase in confidence with rhetorical analysis skills, an increased awareness of the impact of media, and an increase in sensitivity toward patterns of stereotyping and representation. See Table 4.9.

In addition to comparing pre-instructional and post-instructional surveys to note changes for all students, these data were disaggregated by gender and race to note any differences among subgroups. Several notable differences emerged (see Tables 4.10-4.13).

When the pre-instruction survey was disaggregated for gender, the data revealed that girls more strongly agreed with the statement “Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself” (a difference of 0.61), and boys more strongly agreed with the statements “Advertising affects the choices I make” (a difference of 0.56) and “I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis” (a difference of 0.56).

In the post-instruction survey, gender-based gaps decreased for the statements “Advertising affects the choices I make” (from 0.56 to 0.04) and “Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself” (from 0.61 to 0.23); however, other gender-based differences emerged. Girls more strongly disagreed with the statement “Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically” (a difference of 0.70) and “Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States” (a difference of 0.56). Boys more strongly agreed with the statement “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (a difference of 0.54).
Table 4.9
All Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Instruction Survey</th>
<th>Post-Instruction Survey</th>
<th>Difference in Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>4.47 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>3.58 (0.76)</td>
<td>4.16 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>3.45 (1.18)</td>
<td>3.63 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>3.63 (0.97)</td>
<td>3.92 (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>4.05 (0.96)</td>
<td>4.61 (0.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td>2.21 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.68 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td>2.53 (1.03)</td>
<td>1.87 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.29 (1.21)</td>
<td>2.08 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.74 (1.06)</td>
<td>2.29 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>4.13 (0.78)</td>
<td>4.79 (0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>3.26 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.47 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.00 (0.77)</td>
<td>4.92 (0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.08 (0.82)</td>
<td>4.82 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>3.05 (1.18)</td>
<td>3.37 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>3.18 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.68 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>4.61 (0.55)</td>
<td>4.84 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td>3.79 (0.84)</td>
<td>4.24 (0.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>2.79 (1.07)</td>
<td>3.37 (1.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>3.74 (0.72)</td>
<td>4.32 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>3.95 (0.66)</td>
<td>4.42 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>3.34 (0.99)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>4.11 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.66 (0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.82 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.42 (0.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.50 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.29 (0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.13 (0.93)</td>
<td>4.16 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most uniquely, two differences emerged with gender-based responses trending in opposite directions. One gender-based difference of 1.00 emerged for the statement “I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis,” with boys showing more agreement (an increase of 0.90) and girls showing slightly less agreement (a decrease of 0.10), and another gender-based difference of 0.91 emerged for the statement “Media depictions often challenge stereotypes,” with girls showing more agreement (an increase of 0.39) and boys showing more uncertainty (a decrease of 0.30). This suggests female student-participants are gaining more comfort with the concept of rhetorical analysis than their male counterparts while also noticing more stereotype-challenging depictions of their own gender.

The most significant changes for female student-participants include “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (from 3.32 to 4.54, change 1.22), “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” (from 3.04 to 4.21, change 1.17), “I understand how to do rhetorical analysis” (from 3.39 to 4.36, change 0.97), “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 4.00 to 4.93, change 0.93), and “I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis” (3.64 to 4.54, change 0.90). The most significant changes for male student-participants include “The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers” (from 3.60 to 4.50, change 0.90) and “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” (4.00 to 4.90, change 0.90). Though males did not show a difference greater than 0.90 on some of the other questions related to media literacy, they did show a steady increase for nearly all of those items. Taken together, these findings show increased confidence with media literacy and
increased awareness of gender-based stereotypes for both males and females. See Tables 4.10-4.11.

When the pre-instruction survey was disaggregated by race, it showed that Students of Color more strongly agreed with the statements “I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment” (a difference of 0.53), “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” (a difference of 0.73), and “Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it” (a difference of 0.58). White students more strongly agreed with the statement “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” (a difference of 0.55).

On the post-instruction survey, race-based gaps were diminished for the statements “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 0.73 to 0.22), “I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment” (from 0.53 to 0.03), “Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it” (from 0.58 to 0.16), and “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” (from 0.55 to 0.16).

The most significant changes, here defined by a change in weighted mean of 0.90 or higher, for Students of Color include stronger agreement with the statement “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” (from 2.81 to 4.06, change 1.25) and “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (from 3.19 to 4.25, change 1.06).

The most significant changes for White students include stronger agreement with the statements “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 3.77 to 4.91, change 1.14), “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 3.86 to 4.95,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Students’ Pre-Instruction and Post-Instruction Likert-Type Survey Results</th>
<th>Pre-Instruction Survey</th>
<th>Post-Instruction Survey</th>
<th>Difference in Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>4.40 (0.70)</td>
<td>4.40 (0.97)</td>
<td>+0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>3.60 (0.70)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.53)</td>
<td>+0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>3.60 (1.43)</td>
<td>3.70 (0.95)</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>3.70 (0.67)</td>
<td>4.10 (0.99)</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>3.80 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.30 (0.67)</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td>2.20 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.20 (1.03)</td>
<td>+0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td>2.40 (0.84)</td>
<td>2.10 (0.74)</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.30 (1.25)</td>
<td>2.40 (0.97)</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.80 (1.23)</td>
<td>2.70 (0.67)</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>4.10 (0.74)</td>
<td>4.70 (0.48)</td>
<td>+0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>3.10 (0.74)</td>
<td>2.80 (1.32)</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.00 (0.94)</td>
<td>4.90 (0.32)</td>
<td>+0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.10 (0.74)</td>
<td>4.60 (0.70)</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>2.60 (1.17)</td>
<td>3.20 (1.23)</td>
<td>+0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>2.90 (0.88)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.08)</td>
<td>+0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>4.50 (0.53)</td>
<td>4.80 (0.42)</td>
<td>+0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td>3.60 (0.52)</td>
<td>4.00 (0.82)</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>3.60 (0.79)</td>
<td>3.40 (1.43)</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>3.70 (0.67)</td>
<td>4.10 (0.88)</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>4.00 (0.67)</td>
<td>4.40 (0.97)</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>3.40 (0.70)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.05)</td>
<td>+0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>4.10 (0.74)</td>
<td>4.60 (0.52)</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>4.20 (0.42)</td>
<td>4.10 (0.99)</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.60 (0.52)</td>
<td>4.10 (0.99)</td>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.20 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.00 (0.82)</td>
<td>+0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.11
Female Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results

Female Students’ Pre-Instruction and Post-Instruction Likert-Type Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Instruction Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Post-Instruction Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Difference in Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>4.50 (0.75)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>3.57 (0.79)</td>
<td>4.04 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>3.39 (1.10)</td>
<td>3.61 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>3.61 (1.07)</td>
<td>3.86 (4.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>4.14 (0.93)</td>
<td>4.71 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td>2.21 (1.10)</td>
<td>1.50 (0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td>2.57 (1.10)</td>
<td>1.79 (0.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.29 (1.21)</td>
<td>1.96 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.71 (1.01)</td>
<td>2.14 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>4.14 (0.80)</td>
<td>4.82 (0.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>3.32 (1.16)</td>
<td>3.71 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.00 (0.72)</td>
<td>4.93 (0.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.07 (0.86)</td>
<td>4.89 (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>3.21 (1.17)</td>
<td>3.43 (1.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>3.29 (1.12)</td>
<td>3.75 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>4.64 (0.56)</td>
<td>4.86 (0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td>3.86 (0.93)</td>
<td>4.32 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>2.64 (1.13)</td>
<td>3.36 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>3.75 (0.75)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>3.93 (0.66)</td>
<td>4.43 (0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>3.32 (1.09)</td>
<td>4.54 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>4.11 (1.13)</td>
<td>4.68 (0.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.64 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.54 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.39 (0.74)</td>
<td>4.36 (0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.04 (0.92)</td>
<td>4.21 (0.92)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
change 1.09), “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (from 3.45 to 4.50, change 1.05), and “Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes” (from 3.95 to 4.86, change 0.91).

Taken together, these changes suggest a significant increase in confidence with media literacy for Students of Color (and, to a lesser degree, White students) as well as significant increase in sensitivity toward patterns of stereotyping and representation for White students. See Tables 4.12-4.13.

Answering the Research Question

The present action research study was framed by the following research question: What is the impact of a media literacy unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class? After returning a signed consent form indicating parent consent and student assent, data collection included each student-participant completing a pre-instructional survey, pretest, post-instructional survey, and posttest. In addition, ten students participated in a focus-group interview, which took place after the conclusion of the Unit. Throughout the study, the teacher-researcher conducted observations, kept a reflective journal, and conducted member-checking with student-participants to promote reflexivity and reciprocity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertler, 2017; Robertson, 2000). To answer the research question, the teacher-researcher read and reread the data, analyzing, coding, and recoding data until five core themes emerged. The Unit (1) improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of media literacy, (2) increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, (3) promoted the critical reading of media texts, and (4) encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, (5) student-participants
### Table 4.12
White Students’ Likert-Type Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Type Survey Results, Disaggregated by Race – White Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation (σ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference in Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.41 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.32 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.73 (0.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18 (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.36 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.64 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.41 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.91 (0.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.59 (0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.09 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.55 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.32 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.73 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.45 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.18 (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.59 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.36 (0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.95 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.86 (0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.09 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.41 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.86 (0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.95 (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.77 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.91 (0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.86 (0.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.23 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.32 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.55 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.64 (0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.86 (0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.77 (0.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.45 (0.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.73 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.55 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.82 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.63 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.09 (0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.59 (0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.45 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.50 (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.86 (1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.59 (0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.95 (0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.50 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.64 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.36 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.36 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.23 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13

Students of Color’s Likert-Type Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Type Survey Results, Disaggregated by Race – Students of Color</th>
<th>Pre-Instruction Survey</th>
<th>Post-Instruction Survey</th>
<th>Difference in Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td>4.56 (0.63)</td>
<td>4.50 (0.52)</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td>3.38 (0.89)</td>
<td>4.13 (1.02)</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td>3.56 (1.15)</td>
<td>3.63 (1.09)</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td>3.94 (0.85)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.85)</td>
<td>=0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td>3.94 (1.06)</td>
<td>4.63 (0.50)</td>
<td>+0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td>2.38 (1.15)</td>
<td>1.88 (1.09)</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td>2.81 (1.22)</td>
<td>2.06 (1.12)</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.06 (1.39)</td>
<td>1.94 (1.18)</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td>2.94 (0.93)</td>
<td>2.19 (0.98)</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td>4.38 (0.62)</td>
<td>4.69 (0.48)</td>
<td>+0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td>3.50 (1.15)</td>
<td>3.56 (1.03)</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.19 (0.83)</td>
<td>4.88 (0.34)</td>
<td>+0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td>4.50 (0.63)</td>
<td>4.69 (0.60)</td>
<td>+0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.</td>
<td>3.31 (1.40)</td>
<td>3.56 (1.26)</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.</td>
<td>3.00 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.88 (0.96)</td>
<td>+0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.</td>
<td>4.56 (0.63)</td>
<td>4.81 (0.40)</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.</td>
<td>3.81 (0.83)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.85)</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Advertising affects the choices I make.</td>
<td>2.88 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.13 (1.15)</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.</td>
<td>3.63 (0.81)</td>
<td>4.25 (0.77)</td>
<td>+0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I understand how target audience affects content.</td>
<td>3.75 (0.68)</td>
<td>4.19 (0.75)</td>
<td>+0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.</td>
<td>3.19 (1.22)</td>
<td>4.25 (0.93)</td>
<td>+1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.</td>
<td>4.44 (0.89)</td>
<td>4.75 (0.45)</td>
<td>+0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.63 (0.81)</td>
<td>4.31 (0.87)</td>
<td>+0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>3.31 (0.79)</td>
<td>4.19 (0.91)</td>
<td>+0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td>2.81 (0.91)</td>
<td>4.06 (1.12)</td>
<td>+1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of media literacy. These results are similar to previous studies involving media literacy instruction (Berman & White, 2013; Brooks & Ward, 2007; Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010; Daniels, 2012; Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016; Green, et al., 2015; Hobbs, 2007; Hur & Oh, 2012; Liu, Toprac, & Yuen, 2009; Nagle & Stoke, 2016; Puchner, Markowitz, & Hedley, 2015; Scharrar & Ramasubramanian, 2015; Stupans, Scutter, & Pearce, 2010; Tan & Guo, 2009; van Reijmersdal, Boerman, Buijzen, & Rozendaal, 2017; Young & Daunic, 2012).

**Core Theme One: The Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of media literacy.**

Over the course of the Unit, student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of media literacy improved, particularly as related to their ability to analyze target audience, purpose, and construction techniques. This theme is supported by data collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys, pre- and posttest, and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses indicated they felt more comfortable with media literacy skills. On the Likert-type items, the weighted mean for questions related to media literacy (questions 16, 19-21, 23-25) increased, showing stronger agreement. In fact, only two statements on the survey showed a change in weighted mean greater than 1.00, both trending toward “Strongly Agree” and both relating to media literacy: “I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media” (from 3.34 to 4.39, a change of 1.05) and “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis” (from 3.08 to 4.16, a change of 1.08). Notably, disaggregating these data by race also revealed a diminishing of the race-
based gap in question 25 (“I am comfortable with media literacy”). Semi-structured interview questions also support this theme. For example, in response to question five (“What are the most important things you’ve learned from this Unit?”), most student-participants identified skills related to media literacy, including analyzing advertisements, understanding the importance of target audience, and recognizing advertising strategies and rhetorical techniques. Pretest-posttest analysis revealed significant performance gains for student-participants in skills related to media literacy. Overall, posttest responses were longer, and student-participants used more evidence from the text to support their analysis of target audience, construction techniques, and purpose (questions 2-4). This also included stronger alignment between identified target audience and supporting details (questions 1-2). In the focus-group interview, student-participants emphasized that they felt the Unit prepared them for future analytical work, with several students discussing how it informed their analysis and impacted their performance in later units of study in both AP ELC and AP U.S. History. Student-participants expressed more confidence in their ability to perform media literacy, describing the Unit as a “shortcut” to developing critical analysis skills.

These results corroborate findings from Hobbs (2007), Tan and Guo (2009), and Young and Daunic (2012), whose research suggests media literacy can support traditional literacy skills. More specifically, Hobbs’s (2007) findings indicate media literacy instruction can improve students’ ability to summarize and analyze rhetorical techniques, with students writing longer paragraphs and identifying construction techniques, point of view, omitted information, and purpose. Similarly, Young and Daunic’s (2012) findings
indicated that media literacy increased students’ interest and engagement while also improving their ability to analyze audience, perspective, and argument.

Core Theme Two: The Unit increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping.

The Unit also helped students develop greater awareness of and sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping in media texts. This theme is supported by data collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys, pre- and posttest, and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses indicated they were more aware of the prevalence and impact of representation and stereotyping in media texts. On the Likert-type items, the weighted means for questions related to representation and stereotyping showed stronger opinions regarding these topics. Student-participants showed increased agreement for statements relating to the prevalence and impact of both gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes in the media (questions 10-15). The weighted mean for three of these questions showed an increase in weighted mean of greater than 0.50: “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 4.00 to 4.92, an increase of 0.92), “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” (from 4.08 to 4.82, an increase of 0.74), and “Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes” (from 4.13 to 4.79, an increase of 0.66). Disaggregating these data for gender and race revealed a narrowing of race-based gaps for these statements, showing more agreement among student-participants. Trending in the opposite direction, student-participants showed increased disagreement with statements relating to whether popular culture texts represent people realistically and whether diversity in the media industry reflects the diversity of the United States (questions 6-9). The weighted mean
for two of these questions showed a decrease in weighted mean of greater than 0.50:

“Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically” (from 2.53 to 1.87, a decrease of 0.66) and “Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically” (from 2.21 to 1.68, a decrease of 0.53).

Disaggregating these data for gender and race revealed a narrowing of race-based gaps, showing more agreement among student-participants. Semi-structured interview questions also support this theme. For example, in response to question four (“Do you think the Unit has affected how you read, view, or understand your world?”), seven student-participants specifically discussed their increased awareness of stereotypes and representation. Similarly, in response to question five (“What are the most important things you've learned from this Unit?”), five student-participants identified an increased awareness of stereotypes in media texts as the most important thing they learned. This was also a significant point of discussion in the focus-group interview, where student-participants emphasized the importance of critically analyzing media texts in order to decrease susceptibility to those stereotypes. Pretest-posttest analysis also indicated increased sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, with more student-participants discussing how the advertisement uses representation of multiple races and positive social messaging to attract customers (question 4).

These findings are supported by the research of Scharrar and Ramasubramanian (2015), who found media literacy instruction helped shift participant attitudes, helped participants recognize the limits of media’s representation and treatment of race and ethnicity, helped participants address issues of prejudice and racial bias, and promoted an
appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism. Similarly, Berman and White’s (2013) media literacy program helped participants become more critical of media representations and techniques used in advertising, further supporting Core Themes One and Two.

**Core Theme Three: The Unit promoted the critical reading of media texts.**

The Unit also helped student-participants develop critical reading and viewing habits with various forms of media texts. This theme is supported by data collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses indicated they were more critically reading media texts by the end of the Unit. On the Likert-type items, there was an increase in weighted means for questions related to critical evaluation of media texts for both information and entertainment (questions 3-4), recognition of various forms of advertisements (question 17), and awareness of the impact of advertisements in decision-making question 18). This theme is also supported by the semi-structured interview questions. For example, in response to question four (“Do you think the Unit has affected how you read, view, or understand your world?”), sixteen student-participants discussed applying the skills learned in the Unit to their everyday lives, including analyzing advertisements, and an additional four indicated they have increased awareness of the prevalence of media in their lives. This was also a significant point of discussion in the focus-group interview, where student-participants said they are now more aware of advertising (especially product placement) and often “catch” themselves more critically viewing entertainment and news media.

Research suggests such awareness and investigation is important for adolescents because they are especially vulnerable to the persuasive power of advertisements, which
are becoming more integrated into all forms of media content through the use of branded websites as well as brand and product placement in television, film, video games, and social media (Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010). As Van Reijmersdal, Boerman, Buijzen, and Rozendaal (2017) emphasize, though adolescents may be aware of product placement, they are often unaware of the persuasive power of such advertisements and lack the critical faculties to mitigate their use. By building those critical faculties, student-participants learned from their media analysis, developing the skills required to resist manipulation.

**Core Theme Four: The Unit encouraged active student-participant engagement.**

Throughout the Unit, student-participants were actively engaged, a theme they themselves emphasized the value of during member-checking discussions. Student-participants especially valued being exposed to a variety of perspectives and interpretations through the collaborative and interactive aspects of the Unit. This theme is supported by data collected through post-instruction surveys, observations, and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses suggested they responded most strongly to the collaborative and interactive aspects of the Unit. For example, in response to semi-structured interview question six (“What activities, lessons, or strategies did you find MOST interesting or useful?”), fifteen student-participants discussed the collaborative and interactive aspects of the Unit, including class discussion, seminars, and group assignments. Similarly, in response to semi-structured interview question three (“What’s your overall opinion of the Unit?”), five student-participants emphasized the value of being exposed to a variety of interpretations and perspectives. This was also a major point of discussion in the focus-
group interview, where student-participants said they felt more engaged during this Unit than in typical units of study. This is also supported by the teacher-researcher’s observations: During observation periods, student-participants were actively engaged, with student-participants working attentively on assignments and few off-task behaviors were observed.

These findings are corroborated by a variety of studies that found media literacy and the use of popular culture texts can promote engagement and active learning (Brooks & Ward, 2007; Daniels, 2012; Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016; Green et al., 2015; Hobbs, 2007; Hur & Oh, 2012; Liu, Toprac, & Yun, 2009; Stupans, Scutter, & Pearce, 2010). Further supporting Core Themes Two and Four, Grant and Bolin’s (2016) findings suggest media literacy instruction that incorporates diversity issues can increase student engagement and cultural competency. This theme is particularly important, as student engagement has been shown to be an effective tool for improving academic motivation and achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reeve & Lee, 2014).

**Core Theme Five: Student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of media literacy.**

Overall, student-participants’ opinions of the Unit were overwhelmingly positive. This theme is supported by data collected through the post-instruction survey and the focus-group interview. In response to semi-structured interview question three (“What’s your overall opinion of the Unit?”), student-participants said they enjoyed the Unit, finding it fun, interesting, eye-opening, and relevant. In response to semi-structured interview question seven (“What activities, lessons, or strategies did you find LEAST
interesting or useful?"), half of student-participants refrained from directly answering the question, instead emphasizing how much they enjoyed the Unit. Many student-participants emphasized the value of being exposed to different interpretations and perspectives on the post-instruction survey, in the focus-group interview, and during member-checking, suggesting this was a contributing factor for Themes Two, Four, and Five. In the focus-group interview, student-participants also emphasized the real-world relevance of the Unit, indicating this is part of what made the Unit fun, interesting, and engaging.

These findings are supported by Nagle and Stoke (2016), who found that multimedia texts, in particular, hold the “potential to bridge gaps between students’ in-school and out-of-school lives and underscore the importance of allowing students to draw on their out-of-school identities and interests to guide explorations of curriculum content” (p. 158). Similarly, Kim (2016) asserted that access to new and culturally diverse media texts may promote interest and understanding because students are already uncritically examining such texts in informal contexts and should be critically examining them in formal contexts. As Buckingham (2003) argued, media texts increase the relevance of the curriculum to student-participants’ lives and to society at large.

Despite this positive and encouraging feedback from my student-participants, I know there are many improvements to be made to the Unit. Though the Unit demystified the concept of rhetorical analysis for student-participants, I need to continue to add to the variety of magazines and advertisements studied to make it more inclusive of various interests, backgrounds, and abilities. I intend to continue to modify the Unit to make it more student-centered and engaging. For example, when we did whole-class analysis, I
projected the advertisement on the board and facilitated discussion. Though it was not lecture, it did not feel as interactive and student-centered as I intended. When I update the Unit, I will revise that lesson to include providing each student with a copy of the advertisement (either printed color copies or digital copies on their Chromebooks) rather than merely projecting it on the board, and I may also incorporate annotation by using a digital annotating tool such as Kami.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of the present action research study was to describe the implementation and impact of the unit *Reading Mass Media* with a group of 38 AP ELC students at LHS, a rural, Southern, public high school with a racially and economically diverse student body (SCDOE, 2017). The Unit was designed and implemented by the teacher-researcher in an attempt to improve curriculum and pedagogy in AP ELC, particularly as related to the development of rhetorical analysis skills, which are tested on the end-of-course exam. In addition to helping my student-participants develop rhetorical analysis skills, I wanted to create a more balanced and relevant curriculum and to help my student-participants develop critical thinking skills that will help them be critical consumers of media in a capitalist society in the Information Age. Thus, the Unit involved the rhetorical analysis of a variety of media texts, consisting primarily of print advertisements but also including commercials, movie trailers, and reality television clips.

Throughout this study, I acted as a full participant (Mertler, 2017) and worked to balance both *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As an insider, I guided my student-participants through the learning activities in the Unit,
reflected upon my implementation of the Unit, and sought the perspectives of my student-participants. As an outsider, I designed instructional materials and data collection instruments; recorded, analyzed, and coded the data; reported my findings; and designed the action plan described in Chapter Five. Throughout data collection and analysis, I conducted member-checking and engaged in reflective dialogue with my student-participants in order to establish reciprocity and reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertler, 2017; Robertson, 2000). The findings reported in Chapter Four reflect a process of analyzing, coding, and polyangulating various forms of qualitative and quantitative data collected in Fall 2018.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND ACTION PLAN

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Five is to summarize the data and present conclusions as well as an action plan for this qualitative action research study, which describes the implementation of the teacher-created unit, Reading Mass Media. The teacher-researcher created this Unit for an AP English Language and Composition (AP ELC) class in response to the identified Problem of Practice, which relates to the development of rhetorical analysis skills. Rhetorical analysis is a core skill tested on the AP ELC exam, which is taken at the end of the course and determines whether student-participants will receive college credit for the course. This present study describes the first implementation of this Unit in the teacher-researcher’s Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) course in Fall 2018.

In the Unit, student-participants analyzed a variety of teacher-curated, student-selected advertisements. Print advertisements were selected from a variety of magazines with diverse target audiences (Appendix H), and television commercials were selected from a collection of 2018 Super Bowl commercials (USA Today, 2018). Analysis was guided by the Key Questions of Media Literacy and the Media Literacy Smartphone (Hobbs, 2007; Media Education Lab, 2018; see Appendix G), with an emphasis on the examination of target audience, advertising techniques, and issues of representation (Baker, 2016; Kellner & Share, 2007a). In the culminating project, student-participants
selected an advertisement they found problematic in its representation of people or products, wrote a rhetorical analysis essay, and created a counter-narrative in the form of a counter-advertisement, where they challenged what they viewed to be problematic representation (Quijada, 2013; see Appendix F). While some student-participants chose to critique the representation of people, examining patterns of stereotyping and representation, others chose to critique the representation of the product or service itself (see Appendix Q). Student-participants who focused on the representation of people drew from their own lived experiences and a Socratic seminar where student-participants discussed common stereotypes in TV and film (particularly those related to gender). Student-participants who focused on the representation of products or services being advertised drew on our study of weasel words and other misleading advertising strategies (Schrank, n.d.). Findings of this present study, discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, include improved rhetorical analysis skills, increased sensitivity to patterns of stereotyping and representation, and positive student-participant perceptions of the Unit. Student-participants reported they found the Unit informative, engaging, practical, relevant to their lived experience, and helpful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis.

This qualitative action research study is guided by the following research question: What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class? By analyzing a primary data set that includes a pretest and pre-instruction survey as well as a posttest and post-instruction survey, and polyangulating that with a secondary data set that includes observations and a focus-group interview, the teacher-researcher describes student-
participants’ perceptions of and performance in the Unit. The findings of this present action research study suggest that the Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, promoted the critical reading of media texts, and encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis. Though I feel this first implementation of the Unit yielded very promising results, there is ample room for improvement. For example, the lessons that included whole-group analysis could be made more student-centered and interactive by either providing student-participants with color copies of the advertisements under investigation or by sharing digital copies of the advertisements and having student-participants annotate the advertisements using their Chromebooks and an annotation service such as Kami.

Chapter Five provides key questions arising from the study, the role of the teacher-researcher in action research, the process of developing the action plan, the presentation of the action plan, a description of future goals for facilitating educational change, a summary of the research findings, and suggestions for future research.

**Problem of Practice Statement**

Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) requires students to conduct rhetorical analysis, a technique that involves teaching students how to critically analyze texts for their rhetorical, as opposed to aesthetic, function (College Board, 2014). At Lowcountry High School (LHS) (pseudonym), some student-participants enter my AP ELC class without a clear understanding of how to do rhetorical
analysis, which is a core skill tested on the standardized exam required for AP credit. Though student performance on the AP ELC exam has improved over the past five years, the existing curriculum and pedagogy at LHS did not adequately prepare my southern, rural student-participants for the level of rhetorical analysis required on the AP ELC exam (College Board 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). As the teacher-researcher, I conducted a thorough review of existing curriculum and pedagogy, and I found that LHS’s existing AP ELC curriculum did not include units that focused on the development of media literacy skills. Therefore, in an effort to work with my student-participants to create an access point for them to do the difficult skill of rhetorical analysis, I designed and implemented a unit that combined rhetorical analysis and critical media literacy, called \textit{Reading Mass Media}. In the Unit, student-participants engaged in meta-learning about media (Mears, 2010) and rhetorically analyzed a variety of media texts, such as advertisements and TV commercials. I developed this constructivist media literacy unit to challenge the banking model of education made famous by Paulo Freire (1970/2000) that is traditionally used at LHS to teach reading comprehension and critical analysis skills.

\textbf{Research Question}

\textit{What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class?}

\textbf{Purpose of the Study}

The primary purpose of this action research study is to design and implement the unit \textit{Reading Mass Media} with my AP ELC student-participants at LHS. The secondary purpose is to describe the impact the Unit had with my student-participants. To
accomplish these goals, data from AP ELC student-participants at LHS, including a pretest and pre-instruction survey, classroom observations, a posttest and post-instruction survey, and a focus-group interview, were collected and reflexively analyzed. The tertiary purpose is to use the findings of this present study to design an action plan to adjust the Unit for future use with students at LHS.

**Student-Participants**

**Student-participants.** This study involves 38 student-participants who are enrolled in two sections of AP ELC taught by the teacher-researcher at Lowcountry High School (pseudonym), an ethnically and economically diverse public school in rural South Carolina. The teacher-researcher collected demographic data from student-participants themselves, allowing them to self-identify their race and gender. Twenty-eight student-participants are female, nine are male, and one is MtF transgender; 22 student-participants are White, 12 are Black, and four are mixed-race. According to data obtained from PowerTeacher (2018), two student-participants are English Language Learners with high levels of English proficiency. The student-participants come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and 15 student-participants are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Thirty-seven student-participants are in eleventh grade, and one student is in twelfth grade. Though most student-participants have achievement levels corresponding at or slightly above grade-level, five student-participants have Lexile scores that reveal pronounced deficiencies. All student-participants are college-bound, with aspirations of going into a variety of fields, including medicine, fine arts, education, engineering, legal studies, and the military. To ensure confidentiality, student-participants were assigned pseudonyms for this study.
Throughout the study, feedback from my student-participants helped me develop the Unit and adapt it to better serve their needs. For example, though my intention was initially to create a high-interest unit that would help them improve their rhetorical analysis skills, an early discussion with my student-participants revealed that many student-participants were unclear what the term rhetorical analysis actually meant. To obtain more information about this important piece of data, I added three questions related specifically to student-participants’ understanding of and comfort with rhetorical analysis to the pre- and post-instructional surveys. In the pre-instructional survey, the findings of which are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, I discovered many student-participants had little understanding of or comfort with rhetorical analysis. As a result, the nature of my implementation of the Unit shifted to include more dialogue about how what we were doing reflected the skills of rhetorical analysis. Though subtle, this change in approach appears to have had a meaningful effect: The post-instruction survey revealed significant increases for the items related to the skills of rhetorical analysis, marking this as one of the most impactful aspects of the Unit for student-participants. As described in the action plan, student-participant responses to the post-instructional survey and focus-group interview were used to determine what changes need to be made to the Unit prior to its next implementation as well as areas of focus for future cycles of action research.

Key Questions

After implementing the Unit, reviewing my reflective journal, and reflecting with my student-participants on the findings and implications of this present study, the following questions emerged:
1. Will student-participants’ increased ability to do rhetorical analysis with media texts transfer to increased ability to do rhetorical analysis with more traditional texts, such as those encountered on the AP ELC exam?

2. Would embedding media analysis into other units of instruction improve student-participant interest or engagement with those units?

In the first empirical research on the impacts of media literacy on academic achievement, Hobbs (2007) found that media literacy education can strengthen critical thinking skills and help students improve their reading comprehension, critical reading, and writing skills. Since that landmark study, studies by other researchers, including Tan and Guo (2009) and Young and Daunic (2012), have found that media literacy reinforces traditional literacy skills. Many other studies have found that media literacy has a positive impact on student engagement and motivation (Brooks & Ward, 2007; Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016; Green et al., 2015; Hur & Oh, 2012; Liu, Toprac, & Yuen, 2009; Stupans, Scutter, & Pearce, 2010).

Whether the Unit implemented in this present action research study will help achieve the academic results described above has not yet been investigated; thus, these questions should be the subject of future cycles of action research (Mertler, 2017). Though the focus of this present study dealt more with student-participant perceptions and performance within the Unit, future studies should examine the larger impact of the Unit on the development of these academic skills. Furthermore, the remaining AP ELC curriculum should be examined to see where media literacy instruction could be embedded to further improve existing curriculum and pedagogy.
Action Researcher

The present action research study took place within my own classroom at Lowcountry High School (LHS), where I have taught all 12 years of my teaching career. As an insider in this institution (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I have familiarity with the students, faculty, community, and curricula. In fact, I previously taught several of my student-participants in the primary feeder course, English III Honors. As a curriculum leader, I have served as Grade-Level Coordinator for English III as well as Head of the English Department, granting me extensive knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy at LHS. This study took place in Fall 2018, the beginning of my ninth year teaching AP ELC at LHS. My familiarity with AP ELC and its primary feeder course (English III Honors) provided me with extensive knowledge about how students are prepared for the course and what gaps in knowledge tend to exist when they enter the course.

As a teacher-researcher acting as a full participant in this study (Mertler, 2017), I worked to balance both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, my position as an insider was integral to the data collection process. Teaching my student-participants on a daily basis helped me establish a strong rapport with them, enabling us to create a community built upon mutual respect. Throughout the data collection process, I engaged in reflective dialogue with my student-participants, establishing the reciprocity and reflexivity that are so critical to action research endeavors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertler, 2017; Robertson, 2000). For example, after student-participants took the pre-instruction survey, we reviewed the results and concluded that student-participants had some understanding of media culture but little confidence with rhetorical analysis. Though my identified Problem of Practice
focused on the development of rhetorical analysis skills, I had theretofore put little thought to student-participants’ confidence with this type of analysis. This insight informed both my implementation of the Unit and my inquiry. By the end of the Unit, student-participants demonstrated an increase in confidence and performance of rhetorical analysis, as evidenced by the post-instruction survey, posttest, and focus-group interview.

Furthermore, my pedagogical approach was influenced by my position as an insider at my institution. As I adopted a more critical (Freire, 1970/2000) approach to my pedagogy, I felt constrained in the conservative environment of the school and was somewhat hesitant in my approach to the constructivist (Kincheloe, 2005) and deconstructionist (Derrida, 1992) aspects of the Unit. Implementing this Unit involved stepping out of this school’s norms of teaching to the test, and this present study serves as a point of departure for developing a more critical and constructivist teaching practice.

My primary interest in this present study was to examine how the Unit impacted my student-participants, which also places me as an outsider due to my roles as teacher and primary researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As an outsider, I worked to limit my own biases during the data analysis process by keeping a reflective journal, reading and rereading the data, conducting member-checks with my student-participants, polyangulating the findings, and engaging in the constant comparative method of analysis (Mertler, 2017). In accordance with the cyclical and iterative nature of action research (Mertler, 2017; Mills, 2007), future cycles of research, including those described in the action plan below, will reflect deeper analysis and greater specificity as my research evolves.
**Developing an Action Plan**

The findings of this present action research study suggest that the Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, promoted the critical reading of media texts, and encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis. When discussing these findings with student-participants, we discussed how these themes could be used to further improve curriculum and pedagogy at LHS, including but not limited to the AP ELC course.

**The Action Plan**

Action research is a cyclical, iterative approach to classroom research, built upon a four-stage procedure involving planning, acting, developing, and reflecting (Mertler, 2017). By reflecting on the findings and Key Questions that emerged during this present action research study, which represents Cycle One of action research, I developed the following action plan for Cycle Two. The following timeline describes the steps of this action plan, which will take place in the 2019-2020 school year at LHS.

**May 2019.** Following the AP ELC exam, the teacher-researcher will discuss the Unit with student-participants again to see whether they believe the Unit adequately helped prepare them for the rigor of the AP ELC exam. As the Unit was intended not only to prepare students for the exam but also to help them develop critical thinking skills, the teacher-researcher will also encourage student-participants to consider how these critical thinking skills might help them in their future studies. Share with
administration, district English Language Arts (ELA) coordinator, and other ELA teachers.

**June 2019.** The teacher-researcher will review the AP ELC curriculum, investigating additional areas where media literacy instruction could be meaningfully incorporated. Share with other ELA teachers.

**July 2019.** The teacher-researcher will review the results of the 2019 AP ELC exam, which will be published in early July. Based on this data and the findings of the present action research study, she will investigate whether overall student-participant performance on the exam reflected student-participants’ perceptions as well as their performance in the Unit. Share with administration, district ELA coordinator, and other ELA teachers.

**August 2019.** The teacher-researcher will revise Unit materials based on student-participant feedback and teacher-researcher observations. This should include refinement of the magazine analysis activity, additional exploration of the utility of the Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018), creating assignments that include annotation of digital versions of print advertisements using Chromebooks and annotation software, and any other insights gained through previous phases of Cycle Two. The second implementation of the Unit will also encourage students to take social justice action by having them submit their counter-advertisements (see Appendices F and Q) to the companies that were responsible for the original advertisements. Share with administration, district ELA coordinator, and other ELA teachers.

**October 2019.** The teacher-researcher will implement the revised Unit with her AP ELC students. This will involve a deeper analysis of student skills. Based on the
findings of Cycle Two, she will continue to refine the Unit. Share with administration, district ELA coordinator, and other ELA teachers.

**January 2020.** The teacher-researcher will meet with the district’s ELA coordinator and develop a plan for district-wide media literacy instruction. This will include conducting a needs assessment, designing and offering professional development sessions, and developing a media studies course. An action plan and detailed timeline for Cycle Three will be developed in January 2020.

**Facilitating Educational Change**

This present action research study was designed to facilitate positive educational change by improving curriculum and pedagogy in AP ELC. The action plan described above includes further refinement of the Unit as well as increased collaboration with administration as well as other teachers within the school and district. By sharing the findings of this and future cycles of action research, the teacher-researcher seeks to promote reflective teaching practices and cultivate a learning community that is conducive to change.

Creating a community that is conducive to change is extremely important, as attempting to effect educational change can bring controversy when it challenges old ways of doing things. As Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) point out, “it is quite probable that the new knowledge you construct from your study may threaten the status quo and become threatening to others’ assumptions about professional practice” (p. 74). For example, the overarching school culture at LHS still embraces traditional, lecture-based education reflected in the banking model of education (Freire, 1970/2000), and a shift to student-centered models may be seen as less structured. In addition, traditional
notions of literacy are still prioritized at LHS, and the incorporation of media literacy instruction may be challenged by some teachers and administrators. However, as Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) emphasize, there is safety and strength in numbers. By sharing my findings and collaborating with my peers, I will create a learning community that “can provide [me] personal and professional support as [I] share [my] findings and combat others who are resistant to change” (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, p. 74).

In this present study, I sought to improve my curriculum and pedagogy by overcoming my own reliance on the banking method (Freire, 1970/2000) and adopting a more progressive, student-centered approach (Dewey, 1938). This was challenging because I am pressured by the district and parents to prepare students for the AP ELC exam; however, I wanted to develop a more balanced curriculum and resist the temptation to merely “teach to the test,” which often serves to limit the curriculum (Au, 2017; Adams, 2006; Erskine, 2014; Sleeter & Stillman, 2017). To help me in this endeavor, I designed a media literacy unit and sought the advice of my student-participants, whose perspectives helped me improve curriculum and pedagogy for AP ELC.

Student-participant perceptions of my approach in the Unit were overwhelmingly positive. Throughout the Unit, my student-participants showed enthusiasm for the work we were doing, and in the post-instruction survey and the focus-group interview, they expressed how much they enjoyed the Unit and encouraged me to continue teaching it in the future. When I discussed my preliminary themes with my student-participants, several students emphasized how important they viewed Core Theme Four (“The Unit encouraged active student-participant engagement”). For example, one student-
participant said that, before this Unit, she was very quiet and reserved in all her classes—something her current level of engagement and participation in my class would never suggest. Based on my discussions with my student-participants, I believe the Unit helped them build confidence and increased their interest in the curriculum. I hope this will not only enable them to do well on the AP ELC exam, but also to develop the critical thinking habits that will enable them to be critical consumers of media in a capitalist economy in the Information Age.

My current role as a curriculum leader includes being a classroom teacher and the former head of the English department (a position eliminated by organizational changes at LHS). These roles provide me with the opportunity to engage in curriculum leadership within my classroom, my department, and my school. As a leader within the department, I acknowledge and respect the contributions of each of my fellow members, encouraging them to develop their practice, use their talents, find their passions, and become active, contributing members of the department. In doing so, I strive to create a supportive and collegial environment that cultivates collaboration, adaptability, and growth, and I model these qualities in my own actions and encourage them in my interactions with my colleagues. Furthermore, I want my colleagues to know that they are valued and that I want to be there with them (Brubaker, 2004), so I frequently engage in conversations with them and strive to maintain a positive and adaptive attitude, even when dealing with difficult conversations and situations. In doing so, I hope to build a trustworthy environment that supports the growth and collaboration of my colleagues (Tschannen-Moran, 2013).
In this DiP, my role as a classroom teacher is central to my capacity to serve as a curriculum leader. The research site is a public high school that values standardization and high-stakes testing, and as such, test scores such as the AP ELC exam are important. In theory, testing is a method of scientifically and systematically monitoring student understanding in order to detect and address deficiencies (Bobbitt, 2017); however, standardization of curriculum and high-stakes testing have also been used as a method of curriculum control that too often leads to teaching to the test and a narrowing of the curriculum (Au, 2017; Adams, 2006; Erskine, 2014; Sleeter & Stillman, 2017). By shifting my focus away from teaching to the test and shifting it toward finding effective ways to meaningfully engage students in developing the skills necessary for success in and beyond the course, I can improve my teaching practice, demonstrating adaptability and growth while developing what Brubaker (2014) describes as the inner curriculum by pursuing personally- and professionally-rewarding innovative ways to extend and support the required curriculum—and also perhaps encourage other teachers to follow a similar path.

In the action phase of this study, I incorporated a new pedagogical approach by implementing a new Unit in my AP ELC course. I implemented the Unit with the goal of helping my student-participants engage more meaningfully in rhetorical analysis, a central component of AP ELC with which students often struggle. This reflects my dedication to improving my practice and better supporting my students academically and socially, which I hope will encourage and inspire my colleagues to do the same. In this study, I sought to engage in a transformative praxis, departing from the banking model of education that sees students as receptacles waiting to be filled, instead engaging my
student-participants in a reflective and critical practice that enables and encourages them to read the word and the world (Freire, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; McLaren, 2007).

This study involves educating for social justice in multiple ways. First, the Unit infuses the curriculum with social justice concepts through its evaluation of representation in the media (Baker, 2016; Common Sense Media, 2016, 2017; Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007b). Second, this pedagogical approach empowers students by inviting their perspectives through collaboration, thereby bringing them to voice (Kellner & Share, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009). Third, the use of popular culture texts makes the curriculum more equitable by providing more accessible content for less-ready readers, providing an entry point for the development of literacy skills (Bell, 2017; Fingon, 2012; Gunter & Kenny, 2008; Young & Daunic, 2012). Fourth, the incorporation of more diverse perspectives benefits students because it allows the curriculum to act as both a window and a mirror (Style, 1996), challenging the hegemonic “single story” (Adichie, 2009) that most students encounter in curricula that lack multiculturalism. This is particularly valuable for students from culturally oppressed groups, who may otherwise not find representation of people like themselves in the curriculum. As Kellner and Share (2007b) argue, “Spaces must be opened up and opportunities created so that people in marginalized positions have the opportunity to collectively struggle against oppression, to voice their concerns, and create their own representations” (p. 61). This is promoted in the Unit through the development of counter-advertisements as a form of counter-narrative (Appendix F).

In this Unit, I aimed to “employ a variety of strategies to ensure that students develop basic skills and can apply those skills to complex tasks grounded in real-world
challenges,” which is vastly different from the “item teaching” and “drill and kill” strategies associated with teaching to the test (Jerald, 2006, p. 4). Though I still worked with my student-participants to prepare them for the AP ELC exam, I used my role as a curriculum leader to engage them meaningfully in the content by using rigorous and engaging coursework that broadened, rather than narrowed, their curricular experiences. Though this action research study is focused specifically in my classroom, and in the context of a specific course that I teach, its potential to effect change does not stop at my classroom walls.

This first cycle of action research represents my commitment to the various purposes of action research described by Mertler (2017): “to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to improve educational practice, to empower teachers, to provide professional growth opportunities for teachers, to advocate for social justice, to identify educational problems, [and] to develop and test solutions” (p. 31). By developing and testing this Unit, I sought to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to improve educational practice, and to develop and test solutions to an identified educational problem (my Problem of Practice). In future cycles of action research, including those described in the action plan above, I intend to work collaboratively with my colleagues to facilitate positive educational change by helping design and implement student-centered media literacy instruction in other ELA courses throughout the district.

Summary of Research Findings

This present qualitative action research study was developed in response to the research question: What is the impact of a rhetorical analysis unit using critical media literacy on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition class? To
answer this question, the teacher-researcher collected and analyzed data from 38 student-participants using pre- and post-instruction surveys, pre- and posttests, observations and a focus-group interview. These data were then polyangulated to improve the quality and accuracy of the research findings (Mertler, 2017). The results of this study include five findings regarding the impact of the Unit, which describe student-participants’ performance in and perspectives of the Unit.

**Research Finding One.** The Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, particularly as related to their ability to analyze target audience, purpose, and construction techniques. This theme is supported by data collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys, pre- and posttest, and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses indicated they felt more comfortable with rhetorical analysis skills. Disaggregating these data by race also revealed a diminishing of the race-based gap for the Likert-type item “I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.” On the pre-instruction survey, Students of Color were much less confident than their White peers, but on the post-instruction survey, their perceptions of their comfort were much more consistent with those of their peers. Pretest-posttest analysis revealed significant performance gains for student-participants in skills related to rhetorical analysis. Overall, posttest responses were longer, and student-participants used more evidence from the text to support their analysis. In the focus-group interview, student-participants described the Unit as a “shortcut” to developing rhetorical analysis skills and emphasized that they felt the Unit prepared them for future analytical work in AP ELC and in other courses.
**Research Finding Two.** The Unit increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping in media texts. This theme is supported by data collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys, pre- and posttest, and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses indicated they were more aware of the prevalence and impact of representation and stereotyping in media texts. Disaggregating these data for gender and race revealed a narrowing of many gender- and race-based gaps, showing more agreement among student-participants. For example, on the pre-instructional survey, Students of Color showed stronger agreement with Likert-type statements “Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film” ($M=4.50$) and “Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film” ($M=4.19$) than their White counterparts ($M=3.77$ and $M=3.86$, respectively); on the post-instructional survey, Students of Color ($M=4.88$ and $M=4.69$, respectively) and White students ($M=4.95$ and $M=4.91$, respectively) showed stronger agreement, significantly narrowing the race-based gap. This was also a significant point of discussion in the focus-group interview, where student-participants emphasized the importance of critically analyzing media texts in order to decrease susceptibility to those stereotypes. Pretest-posttest analysis also indicated increased sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, with more student-participants discussing how the advertisement uses representation of multiple races and positive social messaging to attract customers.

**Research Finding Three.** The Unit also helped student-participants develop critical reading and viewing habits with various forms of media texts. This theme is supported by data collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses indicated they
were more critically reading media texts by the end of the Unit. This was also a significant point of discussion in the focus-group interview, where student-participants said they are now more aware of advertising (especially product placement) and often “catch” themselves more critically viewing entertainment and news media. This is notable because research suggests such awareness and investigation is essential for adolescents because they are especially vulnerable to the persuasive power of advertisements, which are becoming more integrated into all forms of media content through the use of branded websites as well as brand and product placement in television, film, video games, and social media (Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010). By building those critical faculties, student-participants learned from their media analysis, developing the skills required to resist manipulation.

**Research Finding Four.** The Unit encouraged active student-participant engagement. Throughout the Unit, student-participants were actively engaged, a theme they themselves emphasized the value of during member-checking discussions. Student-participants especially valued being exposed to a variety of perspectives and interpretations through the collaborative and interactive aspects of the Unit. This theme is supported by data collected through post-instruction surveys, observations, and the focus-group interview. On the post-instruction survey, student-participant responses suggested they responded most strongly to the collaborative and interactive aspects of the Unit. This was also a major point of discussion in the focus-group interview, where student-participants said they felt more engaged during this Unit than in typical units of study. This is also supported by the teacher-researcher’s observations: During
observation periods, student-participants were actively engaged, with student-participants working attentively on assignments and few off-task behaviors were observed.

**Research Finding Five.** Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis. This theme is supported by data collected through the post-instruction survey and the focus-group interview. In the post-instruction survey, student-participants said they enjoyed the Unit, finding it fun, interesting, eye-opening, and relevant. Many student-participants emphasized the value of being exposed to different interpretations and perspectives on the post-instruction survey, in the focus-group interview, and during member-checking, suggesting this was a contributing factor for Findings Two, Four, and Five. In the focus-group interview, student-participants also emphasized the real-world relevance of the Unit, indicating this is part of what made the Unit fun, interesting, and engaging.

The findings of this present study corroborate current research, which suggests that progressive and critical approaches to media literacy education, such as that implemented in this Unit, can support traditional literacy and critical literacy skills (Berman & White, 2013; Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal, & Owen, 2010; Hobbs, 2007; Tan & Guo, 2009; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2017; Young & Daunic, 2012), promote cultural competency and an appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism (Grant & Bolin, 2016; Scharrar & Ramasubramanian, 2015), and increase student interest and engagement (Brooks & Ward, 2007; Daniels, 2012; Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016; Green et al., 2015; Hobbs, 2007; Hur & Oh, 2012; Liu, Toprac, & Yun, 2009; Stupans, Scutter, & Pearce, 2010; Young & Daunic, 2012). The impact on student-participant engagement
is perhaps the most encouraging, as student engagement has been shown to be an effective tool for improving academic motivation and achievement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reeve & Lee, 2014). The findings of this present study also corroborate the three principal themes Hobbs (2007) identified in the media literacy literature:

1. Visual, digital, and popular culture “texts” are just as worthy subjects for critical analysis as canonical works of classic and contemporary literature.

2. Individuals actively “read” messages of different forms, making interpretations based on their unique life experiences, cultural background, and developmental levels.

3. Instructional approaches that engage students with personally meaningful texts, authentic inquiry, and hands-on media production activities strengthen critical thinking and communication skills that directly support the development of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. (p. 132)

The findings of this present action research study, which are also supported by the literature, suggest that the Unit had a positive impact on student-participants, both academically and socially.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings of this present action research study suggest two avenues for future research: (1) Examine whether the ability to do rhetorical analysis with media texts transfers to an increased ability to do rhetorical analysis with more traditional texts; and (2) examine whether embedding media analysis into other units of instruction would improve student interest, engagement, or performance in those units. These
recommendations stem from the Key Questions of this present study and will also be used to guide future cycles of action research.

Future studies should investigate whether the ability to do rhetorical analysis with media texts transfers to an increased ability to do rhetorical analysis with more traditional texts, such as essays, speeches, and other print-based texts that are featured on the AP ELC exam and other high-stakes tests. This recommendation was inspired in part by the focus-group interview, where student-participants emphasized that they believe the skills learned in the Unit transferred to more traditional literacy tasks, citing their improved performance in AP ELC and AP U.S. History. This is supported by research by Hobbs (2007), whose findings indicate that media literacy instruction can promote improvement in academic skills, including reading comprehension, critical reading, and writing. As described in the action plan, future cycles of action research will investigate whether Hobbs’s (2007) findings hold true for my local population, an inquiry that could also be investigated by other researchers with other populations.

Relatedly, future studies should also investigate whether incorporating media analysis into other courses and other units of study would increase student interest, engagement, or performance. This present study showed how a student-centered approach to media literacy promoted positive responses from student-participants at LHS, and other researchers could investigate whether their local populations would be similarly impacted. That could include implementation of part or all of the Unit that student-participants in this study found particularly beneficial, including an emphasis on collaboration and the investigation of multiple perspectives as well as the use of the
Media Literacy Smartphone (Media Education Lab, 2018; see Appendix G). Such research could be conducted in any ELA course.

**Conclusion**

This present action research study was designed in response to the teacher-researcher’s identified Problem of Practice, which relates to improving content and pedagogy in AP ELC in order to help student-participants develop rhetorical analysis skills, which are central to the course and essential to success on the end-of-course AP ELC exam. In an effort to challenge an over-reliance on the banking model of education (Freire, 1970, 2000) and create a more balanced curriculum, the teacher-researcher designed and implemented a student-centered critical media literacy unit, *Reading Mass Media*. The Unit was theoretically grounded in progressivism (Dewey, 1916, 1938), critical theory (Freire, 1970/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1994), and constructivism (Adams, 2006; Bentley, Fleury, & Garrison, 2005; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Fleury & Garrison, 2007; Kincheloe, 2005), and it was developed using resources from media literacy and critical media literacy theorists and researchers (Baker, 2016; Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009; Media Education Lab, 2018; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012; The Center for Media Literacy, 2018). This Dissertation in Practice reflects the teacher-researcher’s first cycle of action research (Mertler, 2017) and the first implementation of the Unit, which occurred in Fall 2018. It describes student-participant performance in and perspectives of the Unit. Overall, findings indicate the Unit improved student-participants’ confidence and performance with the skills of rhetorical analysis, increased student-participants’ sensitivity to patterns of representation and stereotyping, promoted the critical reading of media texts, and
encouraged active student-participant engagement. Overall, student-participants enjoyed the Unit, describing it as interesting, relevant, eye-opening, and useful in developing the skills of rhetorical analysis.
REFERENCES


https://scores.collegeboard.org/pawra/ap/apViewReport.action?reportId=7&sub=1

Common Sense Media. (2015). The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and
teens [PDF]. Retrieved from
https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/census_e
xecutivesummary.pdf

from https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/boys-girls-and-media-messages

impact kids’ development [PDF]. Retrieved from
onsense_watchinggender_executivesummary_0620_1.pdf

generation through media literacy. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 52(6),

Counts, G. S. (1932). Dare the school build a new social order? New York: The John
Day Company

Cultural Studies @ UNC. (2016). What is cultural studies? Retrieved from
http://culturalstudies.web.unc.edu/resources-2/what-is-cultural-studies/


Donald, B. (2016, November 22). Stanford researchers find students have trouble judging the credibility of information online. Retrieved from https://ed.stanford.edu/news/stanford-researchers-find-students-have-trouble-judging-credibility-information-online


of entertaining teaching and learning resources. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 13*(5), 1-16.


doi:10.2190/EC.46.3.e

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01643.x


doi:10.1080/15210960.2017.1267514


https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22466


https://doi.org/10.1080/00131940802117761


exceeds-risk-due-to-knowing-their-demo-and-being-culturally-relevant/#91f87ac672a7


APPENDIX A

UNIT OUTLINE

Unit Outline: Reading Mass Media (approximately 3-4 weeks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Assignment(s)</th>
<th>Resources Used</th>
<th>Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pretest/Survey |                                                                         | -Annotation of critical thinking handout  
|               |                                                                         | -Personal reflection on practices of critical thinking with media  
|               |                                                                         | -Lorax/Thorax critical thinking activity (groups) and follow-up (applying 5 Core Questions) | -Hobbs (2007)  
| Media Literacy Intro | Defining critical thinking; introduction to visual literacy; introduction to ML key concepts and questions |                                                                                              | -Baker (2016)  
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              | -Scheibe & Rogow (2012)             | -Unit PPT  
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Projector  
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Critical Thinking handout        |
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Representation handout            |                                    |
| Representation Intro | Define representation; discuss stereotypes; TED Talk: Adichie (2009) “Danger of a Single Story” | -Seminar about stereotypes in media  
<p>|               |                                                                         | -Personal reflection on seminar                                                               | -Baker (2016)                     | -Unit PPT                          |
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Projector                         |                                    |
| Advertising Intro | Introduce advertising; TED Talk: Duhigg (2013) Advertising and the Power of Habit; demographics and target audience; other | -Demographics activity                                                                       | -Baker (2016)                     | -Unit PPT                          |
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Projector                         |                                    |
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Internet access                   |                                    |
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Ethos/ Pathos/ Logos handout      |                                    |
|               |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                    | -Demographics handout              |                                    |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Persuasion in Advertising                     | Persuasion in advertising; weasel words; common advertising strategies; introduce Media Literacy Smartphone (MLS) | - Weasel words activity (groups)  
- Magazine analysis (individual)  
- Ad Scavenger Hunt project  
- Baker (2016)  
- Media Education Lab (2018)  
- Schrank (n.d.)  
- Suggett (2018)  
- Unit PPT  
- Projector  
- Internet access  
- Language of Advertising Claims handout  
- Magazines (covers, table of contents, and ads)  
- Magazine Advertisement Analysis graphic organizer  
- Media Literacy Smartphone (MLS)  
- Ad Scavenger Hunt (Google Slides document) |
| Deconstructing Print Ads                      | Deconstruction techniques; subtext; representation of food, products, and people; photoshop | - Ad analysis and presentation (pairs)  
- Continue working on Ad Scavenger Hunt  
- Baker (2016)  
- Media Education Foundation (2005)  
- Media Education Lab (2018)  
- Quijada (2013)  
- Unit PPT  
- Projector  
- Internet access  
- Deconstructing an Ad handout  
- MLS  
- Magazines (covers, table of contents, and ads) |
| Seminar                                       | Use 2007 Synthesis Essay as prompt for Seminar                                                  | - Copies of prompt                                                                             |
| Deconstructing Commercials                    | Introduce assignment; discuss commercial industry; apply critical questions and                 | - Viewing/listening activity (group)  
- Commercial analysis (group)  
- Baker (2016)  
- Hobbs (2007)  
- Unit PPT  
- Projector  
- Internet access  
- Student Chromebooks  
- MLS |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deconstruction techniques</th>
<th>Class discussion</th>
<th>MLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culminating Project</td>
<td>Select an advertisement, write critical (rhetorical analysis) essay AND create a counter-advertisement as a form of counter-narrative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

UNIT ALIGNMENT TO AP ELC COURSE DESCRIPTION

The following is excerpted from the AP English Language and Composition Course Description (College Board, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Excerpts and Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to AP English Language</td>
<td>• In reading another writer’s work, students must be able to address four fundamental questions about composition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Composition</td>
<td>o What is being said?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o To whom is it being said?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o How is it being said?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Why is it being said? (p. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP English Language and Composition Overview</td>
<td>• An AP English Language and Composition course cultivates the reading and writing skills that students need for college success and for intellectually responsible civic engagement. The course guides students in becoming curious, critical, and responsive readers of diverse texts, and becoming flexible, reflective writers of texts addressed to diverse audiences for diverse purposes. (p. 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The goals of an AP English Language and Composition course are diverse because the rhetoric and composition course in college serves a variety of functions in the undergraduate curriculum. The following, however, are the primary goals of the course:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Developing critical literacy: In most colleges and universities, the course is intended to strengthen the basic academic skills students need to perform confidently and effectively in courses across the curriculum. The course introduces students to the literacy expectations of higher education by cultivating essential academic skills such as critical inquiry, deliberation, argument, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Few colleges and universities regard completion of this entry-level course as the endpoint of students’ English language education; subsequent courses in general and specialized curricula should continue building and refining the skills students practice in their rhetoric and composition courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Facilitating informed citizenship: While most college rhetoric and composition courses perform the academic service of preparing students to meet the literacy challenges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of college-level study, they also serve the larger goal of cultivating the critical literacy skills students need for lifelong learning. Beyond their academic lives, students should be able to use the literacy skills practiced in the course for personal satisfaction and responsible engagement in civic life. (p. 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AP Course Audit and Curricular Requirements</th>
<th>• The course teaches students to analyze how graphics and visual images both relate to written texts and serve as alternative forms of text themselves. (p. 13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Course Curriculum | • Analyze and interpret samples of purposeful writing, identifying and explaining an author’s use of rhetorical strategies. This process includes students’ understanding of what an author is saying, how an author is saying it, and why an author is saying it. Additionally, this process looks at how an author’s rhetorical choices develop meaning or achieve a particular purpose or effect with a given audience. (p. 15)  
• Analyze images and other multimodal texts for rhetorical features. This goal acknowledges the multiple modes of learning that help students acquire literacy, with attention to the power of visual literacy in understanding an author’s purpose. (p. 15) |
| Instruction | • Still another alternative is to use genre as an organizing principle for instruction; for example, one could study the evolution of the essay as its own genre or examine the more contemporary use of graphic and visual texts as argument. The use of genre as an organizing principle offers students the opportunity to explore ways that form dictates function or vice versa. (p. 17)  
• Build complex reading and writing practices rather than discrete skills. When designing their own AP English Language and Composition courses, teachers will benefit from framing the outcomes of the course in terms of practices that students will continue to develop over time, rather than as particular types of knowledge. The concept of practices highlights reading and writing as complex, situated activities that require students to negotiate multiple goals, intersecting skill sets, and processes. Students should develop reading and writing strategies that enable them to anticipate audience expectations and imagine shifting contextual constraints. (p. 18)  
• Create learning opportunities that reinforce desired reading and writing practices. Because the desired outcomes of the course are reading and writing practices, the AP English Language and Composition teacher should design lessons that address and support those practices. The course should provide learning experiences that encourage students to develop flexible and strategic ways to read and write a wide array of texts. For example, teachers can expose students to a range of texts that demonstrate how different contexts,
audiences, and purposes produce different textual forms. Teachers might also design writing tasks that challenge students to accommodate competing expectations from multiple audiences. (p. 18)

- Facilitate understanding of rhetorical reading and writing. The aim of this course is to help students develop the ability to read critically and evaluate sources so that they can write from and in response to those sources. Students should learn to interrogate a text, not only to discern what it is saying but also to understand how and why it proposes what it does.
  - Rhetorical analysis, which requires students to attend to the pragmatic and stylistic choices writers make to achieve their purposes with particular audiences, or the effects these choices might have on multiple, even unintended, audiences. (p. 18)
- In AP English Language and Composition courses, as in most college composition courses, most classroom instruction is focused on reading and composing script or print texts to develop students’ skills as readers and writers. But the familiar appearance of other media in contemporary composition courses (e.g., speeches, songs, documentary films, television ad campaigns) and on the AP English Language and Composition Exam (e.g., pictures, graphs, charts) acknowledges the much broader reach of rhetoric into nonverbal media. Because many high school and college students perform more rhetorical action in aural and visual media than in writing, college and AP English Language and Composition teachers must help students recognize ways in which written texts can and do perform social action, just as those other (perhaps more familiar) media texts. (p. 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Strategies</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socratic Seminar: Students ask questions of one another in a discussion focused on a topic, essential question, or selected text. The questions initiate a conversation that continues with a series of responses and additional questions. (p. 20)</td>
<td>In short, rhetorical reading encompasses both comprehension and interpretation, and the course draws students’ attention to both processes. As readers, students should gain awareness and control of multiple strategies for comprehending the message contained in a text, the purpose or intent behind the message, and the effect of the message on audiences. (p. 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing: Students participate in a teacher-facilitated discussion that leads to consensus understanding or helps students identify key conclusions. (p. 20)</td>
<td>Skill in rhetorical reading is a fundamental requirement of both academic and civic life; ideally, it equips students to conduct academically sound inquiry and argumentation and prepares citizens to participate in intellectually responsible, democratic decision-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
making. It is a reading skill that recognizes language of all kinds as media for social action. Rhetorical reading pays attention to what language does as well as what it says. (p. 21)

- Rhetorical reading assumes that both written and spoken language perform social actions. When we read written texts rhetorically, we are always asking, “What are these words on the page doing?” along with, “What do these words say?” Rhetorical reading compels us to look beyond the words on the page to the “writing acts” they perform. Reading texts rhetorically means trying to understand the social interactions texts can or do perform between writers and their audiences. (p. 22)

- Reading instruction in the course should increase students’ appreciation of audience as a complex and varied concept. Students should learn to distinguish between primary or intended audiences targeted by a writer and unintended audiences that are differently situated (e.g., culturally, socially, historically, geographically). As readers, students should develop the capacity to anticipate and consider interpretive responses different from their own. (p. 22)

- All rhetorical action takes place within historical and cultural contexts that help to shape the social intentions and interpretations of human communicators. Religious and other cultural traditions, such as conventions of identity formation by gender, age, socioeconomic status, geographic location, education, and so forth, affect the ways we use language to accomplish social purposes. (p. 22)

- Kinneavy has described four purposes of discourse as emphases on the four component parts of the triangle:
  - Informative purpose casts primary emphasis on the message (e.g., textbooks, owner’s manuals).
  - Persuasive purpose emphasizes the audience, because the desired end of persuasion is the effect of the text on the audience (e.g., sermons, advertisements, campaign speeches).
  - Expressive purpose emphasizes the speaker’s or writer’s own thoughts and feelings (e.g., diaries, rants, laments).
  - Literary purposes call for special attention to language as an aesthetic medium (e.g., imaginative fiction, poems, humor).

Of course, these purposes rarely exist in isolation from one another; inevitably, the same text serves multiple purposes. For example, a newspaper headline may be primarily informative, but if it is crafted as a form of wordplay it also serves a literary purpose. (pp. 22-23)

- Rhetorical reading, then, is an analytic process that begins as a search for rhetorical purpose along with verbal meaning. We conduct this search by asking questions of the text: not just what does the writer or speaker mean to say in this text or how does the author convey this meaning, but who is the writer or speaker, and why and to whom has he or she chosen to write or speak these particular words on this particular occasion? In short, rhetorical
reading means analyzing verbal texts in social contexts, in terms of how texts signal the writers’ intent through such strategies as word choice, arrangement of content, representations of self and audience, appeals to reason, and appeals to audience values and emotions. (p. 23)

- Aristotelian Rhetorical Analysis
  - Style: What language resources does the writer draw upon to shape and convey the message? To represent him or herself? To represent the audience? To appeal to audience feelings, beliefs, and values?
  - Invention: What elements of historical, cultural, and social context inform the writer’s message? How does the writer’s relationship with the audience shape the message? How do modal approaches (e.g., description, narration, analysis, classification, definition, narration, comparison) function to shape the message?
  - Arrangement: How does the organization of material affect the message and the relationship between writer and audience? What logic structures the writer’s argument?
  - Memory: For Aristotle, this meant mnemonic strategies for recalling the form and substance of a prepared oral text; for writers and readers, memory concerns prior knowledge that a writer brings to bear on a proposition or that a reader draws upon to interpret a text. What does the writer assume to be true? What does the writer assume the readers know? How does the writer connect past experiences and observations with present concerns?
  - Delivery: For Aristotle, delivery meant elements of oral presentation. In writing, delivery involves presentation of the writer’s character, or ethos, and includes argument, not only through stylistic choices such as diction and syntax, but also through conventions of written language conventions such as punctuation, spelling, and paragraphing. (pp. 23-24)

- The readings in the course should lead students to “listen” actively (in a spirit of inquiry) and broadly (across disciplines, history, culture, geography, and genres) to public conversations about consequential topics and questions. Selected readings should assist students in comprehend multiple perspectives on a topic and interpreting both long and short texts of various genres in print and other media (e.g., documentary films, graphic arts, photography). (p. 24)

- In reading the selected texts, students should practice literal comprehension skills (discerning the assertions or verbal meaning of the text) as well as rhetorical comprehension skills (discerning the motivation, intent, or purpose behind the message and assessing the real or potential impact or consequences of the message on real
or imagined audiences). Collectively, selected readings should help students become flexible readers and writers, familiar with a variety of textual genres, able to adapt their reading strategies to the demands of many kinds of texts, and able to adapt their writing strategies to the demands of many audiences and situations. (p. 25)

- “Consequential” topics matter because the questions we ask about them and the ways we decide to respond to them affect the present and future of ourselves and the things we value. Among the various perspectives students may encounter in the course readings are those of different academic disciplines, as the disciplines present public question-asking-and-answering traditions that entry-level college students must begin to consider. While the readings in a single course cannot provide in-depth exposure across all disciplines, they should demonstrate how academic expertise and other types of authority function in public discussion of consequential topics. (p. 25)

- **Controversial Textual Content**
  - Issues that might, from particular social, historical, or cultural viewpoints, be considered controversial, including references to ethnicities, nationalities, religions, races, dialects, gender, or class, may be addressed in texts that are appropriate for the AP English Language and Composition course. Fair representation of issues and peoples may occasionally include controversial material. Since AP students have chosen a program that directly involves them in college-level work, participation in this course depends on a level of maturity consistent with the age of high school students who have engaged in thoughtful analyses of a variety of texts. The best response to controversial language or ideas in a text might well be a question about the larger meaning, purpose, or overall effect of the language or idea in context. AP students should have the maturity, skill, and will to seek the larger meaning of a text or issue through thoughtful research. (p. 25)

- **Popular-Culture Texts**
  - Because the AP English Language and Composition course seeks to cultivate rhetorical reading skills, texts with persuasive purposes drawn from popular culture are suitable for inclusion in the course reading list. Advertisements, propaganda, advice columns, television and radio talk shows and interviews, newspaper columns, cartoons, political commentaries, documentary films, TED Talks, and YouTube videos are only a few examples of texts that represent contributions to public discussion of consequential topics and questions. (pp. 26-27)

- **Images as Texts**

---

220
Writing teachers have expanded their understanding of texts to include more than written words. Teachers of writing imagine how images, among other modes of communication, should be taught and included as part of authentic composing processes and contexts. Historically, visual texts predate alphabetic literacies; however, composing with images is ubiquitous in almost all writing contexts outside of school, where the double-spaced, one-inch margin essay containing only written words is still the dominant genre. In order to prepare students for writing contexts outside of school, writing teachers are expanding their notion of literacy to include a larger range of texts and technologies. In the AP English Language and Composition course, students should learn to analyze and evaluate the rhetorical use of images, graphics, video, film, and design components of print- and Web-based texts. (p. 26)

Visual texts are most commonly understood as images that either stand alone or can be combined with other modalities to communicate much like written texts. Images can be used to make or support arguments, as in the case of editorial cartoons or photographic journalism. Other images such as charts, graphs, and tables are effective in presenting large amounts of information in ways that make it accessible to readers. Such images are also particularly good at showing or suggesting cause-and-effect relationships or comparisons that can be meaningful to contemporary audiences. A quick Internet search of “infographics” yields a wide range of creative ways to present information, and twenty-first-century writers with increasing access to imaging software have the ability to create high-quality visuals to accompany written texts. (p. 26)

Images are not the only alternative to written texts finding their way into writing classrooms. Gunther Kress and the New London School are famous for coining the term multiliteracies and advocating an approach to communication that includes written, visual, oral, gestural, spatial, and multimodal communication. Kress claims that these modalities do not all function the same way; they are not interchangeable, and he challenges us to consider how authentic communication in the world draws on different modes to communicate a message. Therefore, classroom writing assignments that focus exclusively on written texts ignore other commonly available means of persuasion and provide too limited a range of texts for students who need a much broader understanding of communication to function in the world. (pp. 26-27)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthesis</th>
<th>Students must comprehend the major claims in the texts they consult, understand how these claims are substantiated, and identify how they might appeal to intended or unintended audiences. (p. 37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections Between AP English Language and Composition and AP Capstone</td>
<td>The goals of the AP English Language and Composition course and the AP Capstone program are mutually reinforcing in a number of ways. Both seek to strengthen student performance of fundamental academic activities: critical inquiry, analysis, synthesis, and argumentation. Both stress the development of reading and writing skills but also acknowledge the increasing influence of nonprint and nonmanuscript media in public conversations about consequential topics and questions. Both recognize the pedagogical importance of sustained inquiry and composition processes, providing students with time and guidance for complex and long-term intellectual projects. Both provide instruction in the component skills of analysis and synthesis, defining these intellectual operations as essential elements of critical inquiry and necessary preliminaries to critical argumentation. Both encourage students to think, listen, speak, read, write, and take action across disciplines and beyond the academic community. With their interdisciplinary curricula, both the AP course and the Capstone program seek to broaden the range of student inquiry and encourage flexible use of a variety of critical-thinking skills. Both offer curricula focused on skills rather than content in a course of study designed to help students develop the capacity to pursue their own questions and articulate their own decisions and commitments in intellectually responsible ways. (p. 44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

UNIT ALIGNMENT TO SCCCR STANDARDS

The following is excerpted from the South Carolina College and Career Readiness Standards (SCDOE, 2015).

**Inquiry-Based Literacy**
- Standard 2: Transact with texts to formulate questions, propose explanations, and consider alternative views and multiple perspectives.
  - 2.1 Analyze ideas and information from text and multimedia by formulating questions, proposing interpretations and explanations, and considering alternative views and multiple perspectives.
- Standard 3: Construct knowledge, applying disciplinary concepts and tools, to build deeper understanding of the world through exploration, collaboration, and analysis
  - 3.2 Examine historical, social, cultural, or political context to broaden inquiry and create questions.
  - 3.3 Gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources and evaluate for perspective, validity, and bias.
  - 3.4 Organize and categorize important information; synthesize relevant ideas to build a deeper understanding; communicate new learning; identify implications for future inquiry.
- Standard 4: Synthesize information to share learning and/or take action.
  - 4.1 Employ a critical stance to analyze relationships and patterns of evidence to confirm conclusions.
  - 4.2 Evaluate findings; address conflicting information; identify misconceptions; and revise.
  - 4.3 Determine appropriate disciplinary tools to communicate findings and/or take informed action
- Standard 5: Reflect throughout the inquiry process to assess metacognition, broaden understanding, and guide actions, both individually and collaboratively.
  - 5.1 Acknowledge and consider individual and collective thinking; use feedback to guide the inquiry process.
  - 5.2 Analyze and evaluate previous assumptions; test claims; predict outcomes; and justify results to guide future action.

**Reading Informational Text**
- Standard 5: Determine meaning and develop logical interpretations by making predictions, inferring, drawing conclusions, analyzing, synthesizing, providing evidence and investigating multiple interpretations.
5.1 Cite significant textual evidence to support synthesis of explicit and inferred meaning and/or in areas the text leaves indeterminate; investigate multiple supported interpretations.

- **Standard 6:** Summarize key details and ideas to support analysis of central ideas.
  - 6.1 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of a text including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis of the topic; provide an objective summary of the text.

- **Standard 7:** Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
  - 7.1 Analyze how the use of different mediums, modalities, or formats impacts the reader’s understanding of events, topics, concepts, and ideas in argument or informative texts.

- **Standard 8:** Interpret and analyze the author’s use of words, phrases, text features, conventions, and structures, and how their relationships shape meaning and tone in print and multimedia texts.
  - 8.1 Determine the figurative, connotative, or technical meanings of words and phrases; analyze how an author uses and refines words and phrases over the course of a text.
  - 8.2 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the text features and structure an author uses to shape meaning and tone.

- **Standard 10:** Analyze and provide evidence of how the author’s choice of purpose and perspective shapes content, meaning, and style.
  - 10.1 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

- **Standard 11:** Analyze and critique how the author uses structures in print and multimedia texts to craft informational and argument writing.
  - 11.1 Evaluate the effectiveness of the author’s use of text features and structures to support a claim.
  - 11.2 Analyze and critique the reasoning in historical, scientific, technical, cultural, and influential argument writing.

**Writing**

- **Standard 2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**Communication**

- **Standard 1:** Interact with others to explore ideas and concepts, communicate meaning, and develop logical interpretations through collaborative conversations; build upon the ideas of others to clearly express one’s own views while respecting diverse perspectives.
  - 1.1 Gather information from print and multimedia sources to prepare for discussions; draw on evidence that supports the topic, text, or issue being discussed; develop logical interpretations of new findings; and restate new interpretations.
1.2 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners; build on the ideas of others and express own ideas clearly and persuasively.

1.4 Engage in dialogue with peers and adults to explore meaning and interaction of ideas, concepts, and elements of text, reflecting, constructing, and articulating new understandings.

1.5 Synthesize areas of agreement and disagreement including justification for personal perspective; revise conclusions based on new evidence.

1.6 Utilize various modes of communication to present a clear, unique interpretation of diverse perspectives using facts and details.

- **Standard 3:** Communicate information through strategic use of multiple modalities and multimedia to enrich understanding when presenting ideas and information.
  - 3.1 Analyze how context influences choice of communication and employ the appropriate mode for presenting ideas in a given situation.
  - 3.2 Construct engaging visual and/or multimedia presentations using a variety of media forms to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence for diverse audiences.

- **Standard 5:** Incorporate craft techniques to engage and impact audience and convey messages.
  - 5.1 Give extemporaneous and planned presentations that are engaging and well-crafted.
  - 5.2 Deliver messages that present an apparent and logical perspective on the subject and support the central idea with well-chosen and well-organized facts and details.
  - 5.3 Develop messages that use logical, emotional, and ethical appeals.
APPENDIX D

PRETEST/POSTTEST

1. Who was the target audience for this message? (check all that apply)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td>Whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>Blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- to 7-year-olds</td>
<td>Hispanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8- to 12-year-olds</td>
<td>Asian Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13- to 17-year-olds</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18- to 21-year-olds</td>
<td>poor people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22- to 25-year-olds</td>
<td>working-class people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25- to 35-year-olds</td>
<td>middle-class people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35- to 45-year-olds</td>
<td>upper-middle-class people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45- to 55-year-olds</td>
<td>wealthy people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What visual information in the ad supports your answer?

3. What techniques are used to attract and hold viewers’ attention?

4. What is the purpose of the message?

5. What is the subtext of the message? What values are embedded in this message?*

Adapted with permission from materials presented in *Reading the Media* by Renee Hobbs (2007, p. 121).

*Note: On the pretest, many student-participants did not understand question 5, which was originally written “What is the subtext of the message?” To enhance student-participant understanding of the question, I added “What values are embedded in this message?” (also included in Hobbs’s instrument) to the posttest to ensure students could fully demonstrate their understanding of the text under investigation. To maintain the fidelity of the data, results of
question 5 on the pretest and posttest were analyzed as separate questions and were not compared in data analysis.
APPENDIX E
AD SCAVENGER HUNT

This assignment was completed using Google Slides and submitted on Google Classroom. Student-participants had one week to complete the assignment.

The entire Slides document included descriptions of all 13 strategies by Suggett (2018). Student-participants were permitted to omit any three, and those who found examples of all 13 received extra credit points. The first two slides of the Google Slides document are included below.

---

Ad Scavenger Hunt: Ad Strategies “In the Wild”

Advertising and marketing professionals have a bag of tricks to pull from that makes customers putty in their hands. The craft of advertising itself is hundreds of years old, but it has evolved into a science in the last 50 or 60 years, with creativity and methodology working hand in hand to sell you hard.

The following 13 strategies used by advertisers have had great success in selling products and services for a couple of generations, and continue to be used most often.

Adapted from an article by P. Suggett (2018)

Assignment

Find examples of any ten (10) of these advertising strategies “in the wild” (i.e., in your everyday life—find them in magazines, in newspapers, on billboards, on TV, on websites, on social media, etc.).

Note: Do NOT just do a blatant Google search. The ads must be current and live.

For each strategy:
1. Insert an image of the advertisement (either a photo you’ve taken with your phone/Chromebook or a screenshot of the ad).
2. Identify where the ad was found (title of magazine, website, etc.).
3. Write a brief explanation of how your ad uses that strategy.
APPENDIX F

CULMINATING PROJECT

For this assignment, you will complete the following:

1. Select an advertisement that you find somehow problematic in terms of representation.
2. Write a rhetorical analysis essay of at least 750 words analyzing the techniques used in your selected advertisement.
3. Create a counter-advertisement in response to the advertisement. This counter-advertisement must present a critical commentary on the original text.
4. Write a brief explanation of your counter-advertisement, not to exceed 250 words.

To receive credit, you must submit (1) your selected advertisement, (2) your essay, (3) your counter-advertisement, and (4) your explanation. Your project will not be accepted without all four (4) required elements. Your project, which is worth 200 points, will be graded using the rubrics below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Holistic Description</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for the score of 8 and, in addition, are especially sophisticated in their argument, thorough in their development, or impressive in their control of language.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Essays earning a score of 8 <strong>effectively</strong> analyze the techniques used in the advertisement. They develop their analysis with evidence and explanations that are appropriate and convincing, referring to the passage explicitly or implicitly. The prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing but is not necessarily flawless.</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Essays earning a score of 7 meet the criteria for the score of 6 but provide more complete explanation, more thorough development, or a more mature prose style.</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Essays earning a score of 8 <strong>adequately</strong> analyze the techniques used in the advertisement. They develop their analysis with evidence and explanations that are appropriate and sufficient, referring to the passage explicitly or implicitly. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Essays earning a score of 5 analyze the techniques used in the advertisement. The evidence and explanations used to develop their analysis may be uneven, inconsistent, or limited. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the student’s ideas.</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Essays earning a score of 4 <strong>inadequately</strong> analyze techniques used in the advertisement. These essays may misunderstand the text or subtext of the advertisement, misrepresent the choices the text producer makes, or analyze</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
these choices insufficiently. The evidence and explanations used to develop their analysis may be inappropriate, insufficient, or unconvincing. The prose generally conveys the student’s ideas but may be inconsistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.

3
Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but demonstrate less success in analyzing the techniques used in the advertisement. They are less perceptive in their understanding of the advertisement or rhetorical choices, or the evidence and explanations used to develop their analysis may be particularly limited or simplistic. The essays may show less maturity in control of writing.

2
Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in analyzing the techniques used in the advertisement. The student may misunderstand the prompt, misread the text, fail to analyze the choices the text producer makes, or substitute a simpler task by responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated or inaccurate explanation. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization, or a lack of control.

1
Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for the score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation, or weak in their control of language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Holistic Description</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Counter-advertisements earning a score of 8 <strong>effectively</strong> develop a thoughtful critique of what the student perceives to be problematic representation. The student’s rhetorical choices appropriately and convincingly support the student’s position, and the argument is especially coherent. The counter-advertisement demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of language and design.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Counter-advertisements earning a score of 8 <strong>adequately</strong> develop a critique of what the student perceives to be problematic representation. The student’s rhetorical choices appropriately support the student’s position, and the argument is coherent. The student’s criticism of the original advertisement may contain lapses, but it usually conveys the student’s ideas.</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Counter-advertisements earning a score of 4 <strong>inadequately</strong> develop a critique of what the student perceives to be problematic representation. These counter-advertisements may be inappropriately, insufficiently, or unconvincingly developed. The student’s criticism of the original advertisement may be inconsistent or inadequately developed.</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Counter-advertisements earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in developing a critique of what the student perceives to be problematic representation. The student may misunderstand the task, misread the original text, or substitute a simpler task by responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated or inaccurate content. The student’s criticism of the original advertisement may be unclear.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Notes:

- Discuss concept of counter-narrative with student-participants before introducing counter-advertisements.

- The concept of the counter-advertisement was presented by Andrea Quijada (2013) in her TED Talk “Creating critical thinkers through media literacy.”

- Samples of counter-advertisements from the aforementioned TED Talk should be shared with student-participants as exemplars.

- Both rubrics are adapted from standard AP English Language and Composition rubrics for rhetorical analysis and argument (College Board, 2018). Though limited adaptations were made to the rhetorical analysis rubric, the nature of the counter-advertisement required more adaptations to meet the needs of the assignment. Nevertheless, its resemblance to AP rubrics keeps it consistent with the goals and structure of the course.

- Though fonts and margin requirements for this manuscript caused the assignment to appear on three pages, all of the above information was on one double-sided page when printed for student-participants.
This product was designed by and purchased from Media Education Lab (2018), founded and directed by Renee Hobbs (2007, 2011, 2017).
APPENDIX H

MAGAZINES FOR ANALYSIS

Though a variety of media texts were examined over the course of the Unit, most analysis was done using magazine advertisements. Before the Unit began, I bought an assortment of magazines representing various target audiences, including but not limited to those pictured above. The total number of magazines exceeded the number of student-participants in my largest class to ensure all students would have multiple magazines from which to choose. I cut out the front cover, the table of contents, all of the advertisements, and the back cover of each magazine, then placed these pages in sheet protectors and bound them using loose-leaf binder rings. I had multiple reasons for following this process, including promoting cultural relevance, emphasizing the importance of target audience, highlighting the sheer number of advertisements in magazines, and removing any objectionable content. This process was very time-consuming, taking approximately 20 hours to organize approximately 30 magazines.
APPENDIX I

MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENT ANALYSIS GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication:</th>
<th>Evidence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date/Edition:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of Cover:

Observations about target audience (demographics, goals, values, interests, insecurities, etc.):
What subtexts do you see in the advertisements and/or content? What values emerge?

What other trends do you observe (representation, arrangement, techniques, etc.)? Does the context (season, cover model, current events, issue, etc.) appear to have any impact on the advertisements and/or content?

What have you learned about advertising, in this magazine or in a general sense?
APPENDIX J

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY DESIGN

Problem of Practice
The identified Problem of Practice (PoP) for this action research (AR) study relates to a unit designed to support the development of skills in rhetorical analysis (RA), a technique that involves teaching students how to critically analyze texts for their rhetorical, as opposed to aesthetic, function (College Board, 2014). The existing Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (AP ELC) curriculum has not been adequately preparing students for the level of RA they face on the end-of-course AP ELC exam. I designed a unit that combines RA with critical media literacy, a critical approach to media literacy (Baker, 2016; Hobbs, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007a). In the unit Reading Mass Media, students rhetorically analyze a variety of media texts, including advertisements and commercials. Media literacy instruction challenges the banking model of education (Freire, 1970/2000) and has been shown to improve academic achievement, including reading comprehension and critical analysis skills (Hobbs, 2007). The Unit was taught early in the school year as a high-interest introduction to essential RA skills.

Purpose Statement
The primary purpose of this AR study is to design and implement the unit Reading Mass Media with my AP ELC student-participants at LHS. The secondary purpose is to describe the impact the Unit had with my student-participants. To accomplish these goals, data from AP ELC student-participants at LHS, including a pretest and pre-instruction survey, classroom observations, a posttest and post-instruction survey, and a focus-group interview, were collected and reflexively analyzed. The tertiary purpose is to use the findings of this present study to design an action plan to adjust the Unit for future use with students at LHS.

Data Collection
- Primary:
  - Pretest
  - Posttest
  - Pre-instruction survey
  - Post-instruction survey
- Secondary Data for Polyangulation:
  - Observations using Fieldnotes, Group Discussion Checklist, and Reflective Journal
  - Focus-group interview

Data Analysis
- Pretest and Posttest:
  - Coded
  - Details quantified
- Pre- and Post- Instruction Survey:
  - Likert-Type Items: descriptive statistics
  - Open-Ended Items: coded
- Post-Instruction Survey:
  - Used to guide focus-group interview
- Observations
  - Coded
  - Used to develop Unit
  - Use to guide focus-group interview
- Focus-Group Interview:
  - Transcribed
  - Coded

Data Reporting
- Member-checking with student-participants
- Results shared with school and district faculty, including other AP ELC teachers, to be presented in professional development session
- Dissertation in Practice submitted to USC
- Results used to form and enact action plan
Observation Date:
Observation Start Time:
Observation End Time:
Observer Name:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Observer’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX L

GROUP DISCUSSION CHECKLIST

Group Discussion Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working attentively on assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively listening, viewing, or working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posing questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal responses (nodding, gesturing, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact with speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-task behaviors (working on other assignments, distractions, side conversations, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note-taking or written responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotating or highlighting text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointing to /indicating the text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting research (looking up unfamiliar vocabulary, terms, context, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX M

PRE-INSTRUCTION SURVEY

Rate each of the statements from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

For the purposes of this survey, media (which is the plural of medium) refers to visual forms of popular culture, including television, film, and advertisements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral or Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within the United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.

Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.

Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.

I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.

Advertising affects the choices I make.

I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.

I understand how target audience affects content.

I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.

Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.

Survey Addendum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Addendum questions were added after the pre-instruction survey was conducted. Student-participants responded to these questions on the second day of instruction.

1. In what ways do you think these forms of media (television, film, and advertisements) affect you?

2. Do you think media representations affect how we view the world and the people within it, including ourselves and others?
APPENDIX N
POST-INSTRUCTION SURVEY

Rate each of the statements from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.”

For the purposes of this survey, media (which is the plural of medium) refers to visual forms of popular culture, including television, film, and advertisements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver content to audiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of media is to deliver audiences to advertisers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I critically evaluate the media I consume for entertainment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The goal of entertainment media is to make money.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing average people realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular culture texts, including television, film, and advertisements, do a good job of representing American society realistically.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On screen, diversity in the media industry roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the scenes, diversity in the media industry (writers, directors, producers, photographers, etc.) roughly matches the diversity within the United States.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media depictions often perpetuate stereotypes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media depictions often challenge stereotypes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and ethnic stereotypes are common in TV and film.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Popular culture texts affect how I see myself and people like myself.

Popular culture texts affect how I see people different from myself.

Advertisements use strategies to target specific audiences.

I recognize advertising in its various forms, including native advertisements and product placement.

Advertising affects the choices I make.

I can identify the target audience(s) for media texts.

I understand how target audience affects content.

I understand how to apply the rhetorical analysis skills I use on written texts with visual media.

Media representations can affect how we view the world and the people within it.

I understand the concept of rhetorical analysis.

I understand how to do rhetorical analysis.

I am comfortable with rhetorical analysis.

1. In what ways do you think these forms of media (television, film, and advertisements) affect you?

2. Do you think media representations affect how we view the world and the people within it, including ourselves and others? Explain.

3. Do you feel this unit helped you better understand how to do rhetorical analysis?

4. What are the three (3) most important things you've learned from this unit?

5. What activities or lessons did you find most interesting or useful?

6. What activities or lessons did you find least interesting or useful?
APPENDIX O
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Alisha Anderson. I’m your student’s English teacher, and I am also a doctoral candidate in the Curriculum and Instruction program at the University of South Carolina. This fall I will be conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my Doctor of Education degree, and I would like your student to participate.

I am studying the impact of an instructional unit I designed called Reading Mass Media. If you decide to allow your student to participate in my study, your student will be asked to complete surveys about the unit and participate in focus-group discussions. I will also take field notes during observation periods and collect data from assignments within the unit. Informal interviews and focus-group discussions will be audiotaped so I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by members of the research team and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation in this study is confidential and voluntary. Study information will be kept in a secure location, and personally-identifying information will not be recorded or reported. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your student’s identity will not be revealed. Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal from the study will not affect your student’s grade in any way.

In focus-group discussions, others in the group will hear what your student says, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what your student says will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at andersonalisha@bcsdschools.net or (843) 899-8800. Thank you for your consideration and support.

Warm Regards,
Alisha Reed Anderson

Will you allow your student to participate in this research study? Please check one.

_____ YES, I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.
_____ NO, I DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Parent/Guardian Consent

Parent/Guardian Name: ___________________________________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature: _______________________________________________
Date: ________________________________________________________________

Student Assent

Student Name: _________________________________________________________
Student Signature: ______________________________________________________
Date: _________________________________________________________________

243
APPENDIX P

FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following questions were used to guide the focus-group interview. The interview began with a “grand tour” question to allow student-participants to share their overall opinions and experiences, and additional questions were added and/or adapted based on student-participant responses.

1. What did you think of the Unit?

2. On the post-instruction survey, several students, including many of you, talked about our class discussion about stereotypes in advertisements and other forms of media. Did anyone have anything to add related to that?

3. Do you feel like this Unit helped you analyze other media texts?

4. [After student-participants mentioned survey questions, I shared pre- and post-instruction survey results with them.] These are the results from the pre- and post-instruction surveys. [I provided a brief explanation of how to read the results.] What do you notice about the results?

5. [After student-participants began discussing that they believe learning how to do rhetorical analysis with visual texts helped them analyze print-based texts.] Can you tell me a little more about that? And it can relate to the essay or anything, but just thinking about the relationship between the visual analysis and rhetorical analysis.
APPENDIX Q

SAMPLE STUDENT-PARTICIPANT COUNTER-ADVERTISEMENTS