

MEDIA LITERACY AND ONLINE LEARNING

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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MEDIA LITERACY AND ONLINE LEARNING

By

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Abstract

This study is an investigation of students' responses to media literacy and distance learning in Newfoundland's Secondary Language Arts Program. The postings of students relating to concepts of media literacy from several information sources constituted a majority of the data collection and analysis proceedings. Students' values and attitudes relating to both media literacy and online learning were derived from post-study questionnaires and interviews.

Qualitative research methods were employed in this investigation. The study was designed as a case study of a particular site. My role as a teacher allowed me to offer my own insights thereby fulfilling elements of action research. Using the phenomenological practices of clustering I analyzed students' postings, questionnaires, and interview responses lead to a clustering of themes. The qualitative research software entitled Ethnograph 5.0 aided in this procedure.

Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and the subsequent transcriptions allowed a lot of issues and student perspectives relating to both media literacy and online learning to emerge effectively.

It was concluded through this study that secondary students value the potential of online learning. The analysis of data provided several observations and insights about effective teaching models for the instruction of media literacy concepts. Although it was originally thought that the students would be apprehensive about adopting an online platform for learning, the ensuing results were favourable in this research study.

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Chapter One: Introducing the Study

Six years ago I started teaching in a small rural community in Newfoundland. I was originally hired as a French and Technology teacher. However, I quickly learned that teaching in a small school might involve the instruction of students in a variety of subjects. During my first two months on the job I experienced two professional development days for teachers which would significantly impact my future. The first in-service was focused on the integration of media literacy objectives in junior high language arts. The second day dealt with the implementation of technology across the curriculum. The two sessions were met with a lot of reluctance and resistance by some of the teachers in attendance. Outcomes regarding media literacy and technology were perceived to be too difficult for our students and too far removed from the tradition of print literacy. As I sat quietly through these meetings I realized the fact that I could offer something to the teaching profession. Since then, through reflective practice I have worked hard to implement technology integration and media literacy instruction into my classroom. Through study, I have researched current theoretical frameworks for the proper implementation. I hope this research will effectively represent both the successes and failures that I encountered in an effort to instruct and elicit student responses regarding technology and media literacy.

The first chapter of my thesis will inform the reader of my overall rationale for conducting this study. It will outline the movement of technological integration and media literacy into the new curriculum for English Language Arts. The chapter will conclude with an overview of my purpose, my study design and the limitations which evolved throughout the investigation.

Providing the Rationale

Newfoundland and Labrador is one of Canada's Atlantic Provinces located at the easternmost point of the country. The Atlantic Provinces consist of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador and are named regionally for their geographic proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. This study is a response to provincial and regional movements in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) education involving the implementation of media literacy and technology integration. These new trends address the changing forms of literacy and have given rise to new methodologies in the teaching of English Language Arts. Through attempting to implement the changes made by the ELA curriculum developers in both media literacy education and technology integration, I have developed understandings of these concepts. I perceive media literacy to be the active education of students through the exposure and analysis of a wide variety of media forms and expressions. One of the forms of technology integration is online learning. My personal definition of online learning is learning through the use of the Internet and communication tools, such as discussion boards and electronic mail.

My interest in both media literacy and online learning has been piqued by recent initiatives by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to offer courses online to students from rural communities in the province. This movement necessitates the development of effective online instruction courses and activities for students. While the aim of this movement is to increase the availability of a wide variety of programs to all students (W. Sheppard, personal communication, July 29, 2003), I became particularly

curious about how the objectives relating to media literacy could be conveyed in an online format. The Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum guides also make it clear that now, more than ever, students need to be critical readers and consumers, as various texts and contexts aim to make them participants in the target market of various industries and corporations (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1997, p. 29). This attention to media literacy as an integral part of our Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) English Language Arts curriculum has coincided with the importance of changing teacher's instructional approaches to accommodate rapid technological advances. As a language arts teacher, I understand the necessity of making students aware of media texts which incorporate messages designed to increase corporate profits. The need to explore and provide instructional models for media literacy is well documented (Andersen, 1992; Erstad, 1999; Tyner, 1998). According to Erstad (1995), "Without the benefit of such research, media education will continue to fall back on, and be limited to, what young people have mastered in their dealings with the media, while there is also the risk of telling pupils what they already know" (p. 21). The importance of acquiring skills encompassed in both media education movements and technological competency is represented by the claim of Elizabeth Thoman (1999) who says that, "To thrive in our mediated culture, children must learn to become competent, critical and literate in all media forms" (p. 51). My study attempts to accomplish a dual purpose by offering student perspectives regarding online learning, while addressing a need to research this topic in order to best explore teaching methods and models that will assist the students.

Media for representing and interpreting have evolved beyond traditional print formats. As the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum prescribes, “Students will be able to interpret, select, and combine information using a variety of strategies, resources and technologies” (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 1996, p. 25). The growing use of technology in the classroom is also indicated by the statement that:

Students can share information, ideas, interests, and concerns with others through e-mail, Internet audio and video conferencing software, Internet relay chat servers and groups, information listservs, newsgroups, student-created hypertext and hypermedia environments, and shared document preparation software (p. 89).

The advent of multimedia and its future implications for English Language Arts and online learning has become prominent within government documentation. The importance of teachers’ developing strategies for technology integration is underlined by Kamil and Lane (1998) who claim that, “the changing nature of literacy instruction is a critical topic for study if we as educators are to assume our rightful role in suggesting, and even directing, the educational uses of electronic tools” (p. 324). In further justifying a need to explore media literacy online instruction, Domine (2002) studied the media perspectives of a group of eighth grade students and determined that challenges to media literacy are technological rather than commercial. While several studies have been conducted since 1998, very few have explored how students feel about these changing notions of literacy. Cook-Sather (2002) emphasizes the significance of student

perspectives in curriculum development when she concluded that students have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education.

This evolution in curriculum validates a qualitative study of students who embark upon both media literacy education and learning through the Internet and other current technologies. Through a case study approach I investigated the values and attitudes of students who have experienced an online unit of media study. I served a dual role as the instructor and researcher, which involved reflection on my practice in fulfilling the primary element of action research.

Media Literacy Curriculum

Integration of media literacy into Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum

Media literacy education has contributed to the broadening of the traditional notion of literacy to extend well beyond the realm of the printed word. The Department of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador defines the English Language Arts classroom as “an educational network inclusive of reading and writing, speaking and listening, critical viewing, and the ability to make your own messages using a wide range of technologies to include: audio and digital technologies, billboards, print, radio, television and computers.” It further defines English Language Arts as “literacy for the information age.”

In 1996 the Atlantic Provinces of Canada revamped the English Language Arts Curriculum and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is in the final phase of implementing these changes. The document entitled Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum (1996) identified different forms of literacy, broadening the traditional notions of a Language Arts curriculum. In accordance with

this shift in the discipline English Language Arts, the document prescribes that “By the end of Grade 12 students should be able to examine how texts work to reveal and produce ideologies and positions, and examine how media texts construct notions of roles, behaviour, culture and reality”(p. 29). This focus on current media and the power of interpreting intended messages was further exemplified by the prescription that “By the end of Grade 12 students should be able to make informed personal responses to increasingly challenging print and media texts and reflect on their responses” (p. 27). Dedication to the fulfillment of these objectives via the English Language Arts curriculum is initiated through the English 1201 Curriculum Guide (1997), which advises that learning experiences should involve students in examining the role and influence of mass media and other visual arts in their lives (p. 40).

The subsequent curriculum guides which ensued in Newfoundland and Labrador reflected the focus of the Atlantic region on media literacy as an asset and the creation of awareness of media’s power as a valuable understanding to foster within our students. The UNESCO proclamation in 1982 advocated the preparation of young people for a world of powerful images, words, and sounds (Emmans and Herrington, 2002). In the overview for the implementation of the new Language Arts curriculum this potential was described aptly in the statement that “through the research process of critically questioning ideas, points of view, and cultural perspectives, students can revise their understandings, perceive weaknesses in information, and make better sense of the world” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, p. 81).

The potential of this emergent literacy to create an intrinsic sense of worth for learning within secondary students is justified by claims that media literacy deals with the

culture and lifestyle of students (p. 74). For teachers it provides an opportunity to have students examine how they are influencing and being influenced by popular culture. Media study allows students to investigate issues of power and control” (p. 75). Through showing students how to better evaluate and explore the meaning behind their popular culture, media educators are providing them with skills and knowledge to help them prepare for their future and more critically read their present world.

The media literacy movement in high schools has had considerable success in other Canadian provinces. In 1989 the Ontario Ministry of Education initiated Canada’s media education movement with their definition of media literacy as “concerned with helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques” (Shepherd, 1993). This statement represented a shift in ideology for much of the curriculum design that transpired in the 1990s. As opposed to the teaching of English Language Arts as drill and practice it evolved as a resource which aims at enabling students to critically assess the world around them and try to establish their place in society. It represented a mantra for all educators involved in the media literacy movement and displays a new focus in Language Arts. Although Canada's ten provinces and three territories each have their own education systems, collaboration on the development of curriculum frameworks in core subject areas through the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (WCP) in the West and the APEF in the East—has resulted in media education being granted official status across the country (Media Education in Canada, 2004).

Constructing meaning from various texts has extended beyond the covers of the traditional books to the world of media and communication. It is media and communication that forms the basis for much of our time consumption and heavily influences our beliefs. Atlantic Canada's Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum endorses the construction of meaning throughout the prescribed objectives and emphasizes its commitment to media education. In relation to this construction of meaning by exploring a variety of kinds of texts, Hammett (1999) states that media and print texts and literacies can be integrated to both complement and challenge one another.

Justification for Media Literacy

Ontario educator Neil Andersen (1992, p.1) defines the value of media education when he states that, "To a large degree, our images of how to be comes from the media. They are crucial shapers of the young lives we are striving to direct." This identification of media literacy as a tool for today's youth resonates throughout much of the research which is currently available on this topic (Emmans and Herrington, 2002; Sefton-Green, 2000; Thoman, 1999). However, media literacy activists such as David Buckingham (1991) advise educators to perceive students as message producers and not as victims of corporations with hidden agendas. It is the experience of students which contributes to the creation of meaning from various texts.

Leading media literacy pioneer Len Masterman (1985) follows an empowerment rhetoric similar to that of Andersen when he states that:

Media Education represents perhaps one of the best hopes that society has of countering the most blatant duplicities of the public relations industry, of

encouraging more demanding standards from journalists, of producing more discerning, skeptical and knowledgeable audiences, and of clarifying the rules for manipulating the media for everyone so that we can all play the game if we so wish, though never, of course on equal terms (p.10).

One important aspect of media literacy is the issue of audience. Emery (1996) indicates that audience research has shown that, rather than being passive receivers of meanings determined elsewhere, audiences are active and ceaseless producers of meaning. As educational agencies mandate the integration of media literacy studies through the various curriculum guides, studies need to be conducted which explore the ability and impact of media education on secondary students as a specified target audience.

Integrating Technology in Language Arts Education

Technological Competency in Newfoundland and Labrador

Technological competency is one of Newfoundland and Labrador's essential graduation learnings. Technology integration in this province has been largely cross-curricular in nature. The Foundation for the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum Guide advocates the integration of technology in English Language Arts through its suggestion that "Students will be able to interpret, select, and combine information using a variety of strategies, resources and technologies" (p. 25). Further directives found throughout recently-developed Language Arts documents in this province also display a commitment to fostering technological competencies in students. As the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education's first revamped English Language Arts curriculum guide states, "Students will be expected to create texts

collaboratively and independently, using a variety of forms for a range of audiences and purposes” (p. 27). The recognition of forms of expression and conveyance of ideals which extend beyond the traditional texts of English literature and language display the government’s commitment to ensuring ample opportunity for student’s technological competency to develop. The potential of online technology, such as the Internet, electronic mail and discussion boards within the secondary English classroom, has also been identified clearly by these documents. They advise that, “students and teachers must be prepared to deal with the growing access to and exponential growth of information, expanding perceptions of time and space in a global context, new ways to interact and interconnect with others, and a technologically oriented environment characterized by continuous, rapid change” (p. 88).

Using Online Learning for Media Literacy Instruction

One of the fundamental ideas which formed the basis for this research was Tyner’s (1998) belief that educational strategies should blend critical literacy, experiential learning and critical pedagogy, thereby leading to an explanation for the relationship between literacy, technology and society. Using online technologies for learning is one such strategy for blending critical literacy, experiential learning and technology integration. Creating an online environment, in conjunction with face-to-face interaction, enhances several of the objectives which epitomize the integration of media literacy into the English Language Arts curriculum.

The past twenty years have witnessed a rise in computer-mediated communications (CMC) in the field of education. Studies which aimed to identify secondary students’ perspectives into the impact of this technology have been limited

(Romizowski and Mason, 1996; McIssac and Gunawardena,1996). Online learning is most prevalent in distance education. Kumar et al. (2002) claimed that designing and developing virtual education degree programs requires a collective effort with all participants in the educational process contributing. This research finding can be applicable in the instruction of secondary English Language Arts as both students and teachers deserve input into online course content and design. In looking at implications for online learning, Hara and Kling (1999) suggest that educators need to conduct research into student perspectives and experiences in order to better understand online learning.

The necessity to explore the various tools and techniques associated with online learning has increased significantly in provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador, where online learning is the new format for distance education courses which are being implemented in order to alleviate programming problems in rural regions of the province. Educators and policy makers here want to ensure that students in small, rural schools have equal access to the same variety of courses and programs as students in larger centres and schools. The government-driven initiative has been labeled the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI). The aim of CDLI is to respond to challenges of the delivery of k-12 education in the province and to capitalize on dramatic advances in information, learning and communications technologies. It is also an attempt to ensure equal access to education. According to Mr. Wade Sheppard (personal communication, July 29, 2003), who serves as the Director of CDLI, the goal of CDLI is not to replace the traditional classroom but, rather, to provide equal access to educational programs (CDLI, 2003). Through consultation of the current research on online education, CDLI has

created a generic template which guides their online course development. Sheppard (2003) states that there are fundamental requirements which need to be present to ensure quality online instruction. These qualities include asynchronous and synchronous communication abilities, a web site which is well-laid out and easily navigatable, and connectivity which is sufficient to permit multimedia presentation. Online learning in the English Language Arts courses has become a reality as English 1201 will be taught via the online CDLI portal in September, 2004 (W. Sheppard, personal communication, July 29, 2003). The use of online technologies is advocated throughout the new curriculum guides as it states clearly that, "Teachers should use a variety of social interactions as well as instructional contexts" (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1996, p. 40). Online learning is an instructional context that provides a space for social interaction. The creation of an online learning environment is further supported by the curricular mandate that English Language Arts classrooms need to be centers of inquiry where students and teachers investigate their own language learning, both individually and as a learning community (p. 39). These points justify my study, which aims to explore what happens when rural Newfoundland high school students use an online format within a media studies unit in English education, and lends credence to my assertion of the significance of this research.

Goals of this Research

The purpose of this study is to reflect upon the use online learning as a vehicle for a media studies unit. The perspectives of secondary students can provide curriculum developers in Newfoundland and Labrador with a unique insight into effective online

teaching and learning formats. Later in this thesis a review of existing literature will demonstrate this point.

The following research questions guided this action research study:

- What are the students' responses to the various study modules in a media literacy unit?
- What happens when I teach media literacy modules online?
- What activities and content elicited the most response in the online format?
- Do students view the Internet as an effective and equitable teaching and learning medium?
- Can students formulate, critique and publish their own multimedia products and develop a sense of critical awareness of Internet and other media messages in an online learning environment?
- How can online learning outcomes and media literacy outcomes best be assessed?
- What are the most appropriate forms of assessment for high school students learning media literacy online?
- What types of supports are required to improve success for more learners in online and off-line learning settings?
- What understandings of the potential and impact of online learning can be learned during a teacher action research study?

Overview and Methodology of This Study

My study investigated both media literacy instruction and online learning. This study involved a two-month study of a class of 21 high school students in a large Newfoundland and Labrador rural school who completed an online Language Arts unit

on media literacy. Of the 21 students, 12 agreed to participate in this study. These students all lived within a twenty-five kilometer radius of the school. The unit was taught via an online discussion forum and a website which incorporated various forms of multimedia which were to be evaluated by the students. With students' and parents' permission online responses, discussions, and media compositions were monitored during the two-month unit of study.

I had taught these students in a traditional classroom context for the first six months of the school year. The online format was adopted for the study on media literacy as it allowed students to learn how to use and capitalize upon new technologies. It offered the students a change of environment, while providing an opportunity to study media literacy. Throughout the study all class time was spent in the school's computer lab. If students were to become a part of an online learning environment I wanted to make the classroom setting as technology-oriented as possible. While I was present in the computer lab with them for the majority of the unit, I did not lecture the students or provide notes other than those found on the course web site. Assistance was provided to the students via e-mail and my own web postings. Students rarely approached me with direct face-to-face questions. Nevertheless, those students who did ask these direct questions were not denied assistance. I was absent from class for a period of two weeks attending various school board meetings and an academic conference in Montreal, Quebec. During this time, class was still carried out as I made postings and replies to their forum contributions from these different localities. Evaluation of the students' values and skill acquisition was achieved through continuous assessment of online discussion board postings and a final student production of media texts.

The curricular goal of this unit of media study was to provide students with brief exposure to a number of online media productions. The topic of media literacy has been the subject matter for entire secondary courses in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Media and Society 3222) and therefore, I considered it to be more feasible to include four forms of online media, which I felt dominate the World Wide Web. I considered that the students need to be exposed to different online functions in society and I planned the diverse nature of the modules to accommodate this belief. The modules were not intended to be completed in any particular order. As well, the variety of sites were meant to allow students to apply the same high level of discussion surrounding weighty issues, such as online news coverage, to lighter media of equivalent abundance, such as online advertising. The unit was comprised of four modules that explore the following elements of media study:

Module One: The Study of Online Advertising. Through an exploration of key advertising sites students were asked to view and respond to advertisements of major industries and corporations. They were specifically required to identify the key elements of each site while identifying the target market for the product. The students submitted their responses via e-mail for this module and two probing questions were given as feedback to their initial responses. These probing questions were intended to serve as a framework for further elicitation of online advertising ideas. The students were not restricted by the specific nature of the questions and were encouraged to draw on their own divergent experiences and opinions.

Module Two: An Investigation of Online News Sources. Students were first directed to a School-Net sponsored site entitled "How to Detect Bias in the Media".

Students were then asked to evaluate and interpret responsible news coverage through an investigation of five news sites from various countries. The study explored issues of propaganda and the depth of news reporting included in each website. Three sites represented privately-owned news sites based in the United States of America. The two remaining sites were crown-operated news agencies in Canada and Britain. The central news story during this study was the U.S.-led war with Iraq. While I attempted to include sites centred in the Middle East, these news agencies and Middle Eastern media outlets were not accessible to the students by the time the unit commenced. Using the course discussion forum students posted their opinions regarding the value and contribution of each site. The students were then asked to respond to more instructor posted probing questions while being challenged to ask questions of their fellow classmates.

Module Three: Online Government Agencies. Students were asked to analyze web sites which have been posted by the four tourism departments in the Atlantic region of Canada. Values and attitudes were the focus of the required analysis and the final evaluation was the identification of similar characteristics and elements across the sites. Using the School-Net bias resource from the news module, students were prompted to develop their own set of criteria for effective online tourism sites. Throughout this process they were asked to consider the use of graphics and increasing use of Flash technology in the online tourism industry. Students used the discussion forum as the principal communication medium for their responses.

Module Four: Network Programming Via the Internet. Competition among television networks has led them to use the Internet to advertise and extend their programming. Students analyzed four examples of these sites which have been created by the four major

American networks. I designed a site which formulated questions requiring analysis and interpretation. The students viewed the sites with a search for common characteristics and were asked to identify how Flash media is used in these web sites. The students were also asked how the use of Flash technology is intended to appeal to a specific audience and target group.

Data Collection

Data collection involved the compilation and analysis of students' online responses, critiques, publications and any other classroom abstracts students produced individually or in groups, which were comprised of all 21 students in the class. Student and parental permission was obtained prior to the commencement of this project. Interviews and surveys were completed by participating students following the completion of the unit. These post-curriculum data collection arrangements were carried out after all evaluation had been completed and marks for the course had been entered and distributed to each student. Archiving of audio responses for analysis also took place at the end of the unit. All data was coded using Ethnograph 5.0, a qualitative research analysis software.

Formal interviews and student questionnaires aimed to provide insight into the attributes which best suit the online learning environment, while providing invaluable data concerning student views concerning equity in online learning environments and the role of technology in the acquisition of new knowledge. My ultimate objective for the research was to use student perspectives to identify key characteristics of successful online course design and instruction.

The Limitations for the Study

The aim of the study is meant to provide insight into of high school students' experiences with online learning and the findings are not meant to be generalizable. The action research study of this learning environment, along with the conclusions, apply only to the given context. Another limitation that was prevalent throughout the study related to the initial apprehension to the online learning format on behalf of several students. Had the study been longer there might have been a higher degree of ease with online learning, thereby permitting a more thorough representation of students and their experiences with this phenomenon. This study was also limited by my (the researcher's) familiarity with the media literacy concepts I was introducing. I am confident subsequent offerings of this course unit in this online format will be improved, which is the intention of action research in one's own classroom.

Chapter Two: Past and Present Media Literacy and Online Research

This chapter will describe previous studies regarding both media literacy and technology integration in education. The chapter follows a progression of themes relating to media literacy research to those relative to the exploration of involving technology integration in the media education instructional models.

Justification for Curricular Integration of Media Literacy

Educators and researchers have recently paid greater attention to the disparity between school texts and literacies and those favoured by students out of school. Bybee and Overbeck (2001) published media research entirely based upon the cult popularity of “The Simpsons” in their attempt to show how such a television program can be used as a starting point for exploring postmodern theory. Through their research they have demonstrated how postmodernism calls attention to the ways in which a great deal of everyday popular culture is now fully informed by, if not driven by, media and how media construct social realities.

Research into the effects of media literacy instruction presents themes exemplifying the importance of linking students’ media experiences to their education, the perspectives of teachers regarding media education and the potential of using technology as a viable format for media instruction (Thoman, 1999; Hobbs, 1999; Hart, 1998).

Importance of Linking Student Experiences to Education

The importance of linking student’s lived experiences to their education is a phenomenon which has intrigued educational researchers. The fact that current media constitute much of students’ social experience justifies an exploration of how media

education can enhance learning amongst secondary students. As Elizabeth Thoman (1999) advised media literacy instructors, "Media no longer just influence our culture. They are our culture" (p. 55).

Renee Hobbs (1999) conducted a major study in media literacy teaching in Australia. She investigated the students and took particular interest in their ability to identify genre, target audience, and author's motive or intent. She explored the ability for students to identify production techniques which attract audience attention or interest and a demonstrated awareness of technical elements including sound, lighting, and editing as these elements affect viewer response. She provided media literacy education to one group and allowed the second group to answer questions without a high degree of formal education in media education. She determined through her research that the effect of media-literacy training upon student responses was pronounced. Students who were enrolled in course work which demanded their active involvement in media analysis questions and activities performed substantially better at basic media literacy competencies than students whose course work had been less substantive. As expected, students' analysis skills are activated differently depending on the specific media genre they are asked to analyze. Students' skills are weaker when asked to analyze television news compared with their skills in analyzing television advertising thereby illustrating the power of linking actual students' experiences with achieving curriculum outcomes.

While studies involving secondary students in relation to media literacy have been limited, students have been participants in research of media literacy. For example, Sefton-Green (2000) studied the potential of media literacy as meaningful learning for students through playground observation and discussion with children and parents. He

states that schools have to connect with the world of young people. In his conclusions he claims that children's experience of popular culture, TV computer games, and so on, are a source of a vast amount of informal knowledge that should be acknowledged and that, through the recognition of this dimension of children's lives, we might give a more critical edge to the formal curriculum, thereby, making it more intellectually challenging.

Zindovic-Vukadinovic (1998) also conducted a study of fourteen year olds graduating from the various elementary schools in Belgrade. She conducted empirical research to determine the level of the recognition of and the understanding of both visual and non-visual codes that go on to make a motion picture story. One of her first observed characteristics was the fact that the 14 year olds made more use of their social and cultural experience and less of their media experience in interpreting the intention of the director of the motion picture. She indicated that these students see and interpret events according to stereotypes reigning in their environment. She reported a high level of trust, confidence and belief in the motion picture among children who are considered to be growing up in front of a TV screen. As she aptly reports this high level of faith makes these students subject to media manipulation (Zindovic-Vukadinovic, 1998). These research findings point to a necessity to further explore the potential to equip citizens with the critical skills that are associated with media literacy (Andersen, 1992).

The ability of media education to motivate students merely by providing them with an education that is built upon prior knowledge has been studied. However as Hart and Hicks (2000) recommend, empirical studies of how and what pupils are learning in the classroom should help us further understand the implications of media literacy in the contemporary classroom. My study of the students learning experiences and their

perspectives regarding the learning format should help to show the impact of an online media literacy unit in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Teacher Perspectives on Media Literacy

Recent studies have explored the perspectives of teachers who are affected by the media literacy movement in education. In a study of media education examining teachers' perspectives, Renee Hobbs (1999) reported that teachers found the recognition of deep and varied connections between students' experience of the mass media and the essential themes of the arts and the humanities to be energizing.

Andrew Hart (1998) compiled rare research-based findings in a landmark publication for media education in Teaching the Media: International Perspectives. The aim of this report was to enable readers to gain a broader understanding of media education, and to offer teachers a chance to reflect on their own experiences. He compiled the personal experiences of several teachers as they struggled and succeeded with media literacy integration in their respective countries. Hart found that teachers were willing to embrace media literacy with all of its strengths and weaknesses.

From a Canadian point of view Ontario emerged as the earliest leader in our national media literacy movement (Shepherd, 1992). In 1992, Coghill conducted case studies of two teachers in Ontario who followed an aesthetic and technicist approach to media literacy instruction. The aesthetic-oriented teacher used a "student as consumer" approach to teaching media literacy while the technicist adopted a hands-on, technical approach to the same topic. This report provided insight into the different perspectives and the resulting models for media education which could be further explored. Coghill

concluded that both the technician and aesthetic teacher could provide a hands-on or abstract look at the instructing media literacy.

Chaffee (2000) believed that we can gain insight into more models for media education via in-depth studies of the people who are responsible for teaching the curriculum. Chaffee attempted to identify the media education practices of secondary teachers in British Columbia and to demonstrate how personal background and philosophies affect their coverage of media literacy. In his study he determined that some media literacy teachers tend to adopt a radical and political deficit-theory in their approach while other teachers adhere to an acquisition-theory which follows the principle that students should become more aware of global influences through media literacy. Despite the theoretical divide which exists between the two styles, Chaffee concluded that the perspectives offered by these teachers all represented a positive desire for students to constructively criticize current forms of media.

The need to further investigate the perspectives of educators who are currently conveying media literacy concepts is paramount because it is a recently-endorsed movement and both its flaws and strengths require exploration. Hart and Hicks' (2000) elaborated upon the research which was compiled by Hart in 1998 by examining the range of approaches to media teaching in England in secondary schools. This study also aimed to provide an account of the forms and purposes of ICT in English teaching. Their recommendations were thorough in recognizing the need for more large-scale research into perceptions, purposes and practices of teachers.

Papert (1993) referred to the computer in the title of his book as “The Children’s Machine” and he argues that this tool offers a means of self-teaching, suggesting that learning will take place outside of school and beyond the curriculum. The development of ‘new’ media such as multimedia, the Internet, networks, the web, and virtual reality are transforming the nature, role and status of classic media and making it necessary for teachers as well as researchers to reconsider the theoretical tools, methods of analysis, scenarios of use and pedagogical practices of media education. The transition from developing media from a technical viewpoint to composing them from a social or curriculum perspective implies that we should learn to use machines and media so as to better understand the reality which they represent and construct. We also need to understand the nature and functions of technologies and their influence on us when we mediate our interrelationship with the world and with each other (Peraya and Rickenmann, 1998).

The Internet incorporates several modes of computer mediated communication (CMC) which have been identified by local television stations as a resource [or tool] to retain and attract audiences. While television audiences are declining (CommerceNet/Nielsen Media Research, 2003), Internet use has reached 71% (UCLA, 2003). With the majority of the western world using Internet tools and resources, it has earned a rightful place in the realm of media literacy education.

Kubey and Serafin (2001) conducted a study for the Discovery Channel which analyzed quantitative data collected from the teachers as well as their open-ended self reports. The findings from this research were extremely positive in regard to most every

aspect of the Discovery Channel's "Assignment: Media Literacy" (AML). Eighty-five percent of teachers agreed that their students are more enthusiastic about learning as a result of being introduced to media literacy. Sixty-four percent of teachers agreed or slightly agreed that their students were writing more as a result of the AML curriculum. This effectively shows how the material encompassed in media literacy learning has the potential to motivate students and encourage learning for the intrinsic reward involved.

Hart and Hicks (2000) engaged in a study which examined the range of approaches to media teaching in England in secondary schools. This study explored various teacher's perspectives and practices while also aiming to provide an account of the forms and purposes of Information Communication Teaching in English teaching. In their recommendations they indicated that the new digital information and communication technologies will need to be seen as more than simply information resources, writing media or an authentic publishing forum. They will need to be seen as objects of critical study in their own right. This recommendation gives rise to the integration of media literacy and technological competency as related skills in the educational field, which require conjoint interrelated research and exploration. While my own personal notion of media literacy involves raising the level of critical awareness of media forms and content, Hart and Hicks describe media education simply as the formal exploration of media.

Online Learning and Media Literacy

Student Responses to Online Learning

Like media literacy, the notion of online learning features mostly academic descriptions and research which have advocated the potential of CMC for teaching and

learning. Throughout the past ten years there has been a slow rise in studies relating to online learning. Romizowski and Mason (1996) claimed that little qualitative research based on observation and interviewing in CMC has been conducted. The research on the effect of online learning has been focused on student outcomes (Ahern and Repman, 1994), but not on the affective aspects of distance education. McIssac and Gunawardena (1996) criticize the research literature in online learning because of lack of research rigor. However, recent years have resulted in research that has aimed to alleviate some of the perceived inadequacies of online learning. Issues such as the feelings of alienation reported by students in a study by Milliron (2001) and Morton and Clovis (2002) along with Walter Baer (2002), who determined that several individual online courses have been plagued with problems such as inadequate technical support, poorly thought out structures, and student dissatisfaction with the interactive components has resulted in this rise in online research.

An adjustment to a new “faceless” form of communication has been attributed to some of the initial problems with online learning as reported by Willis and Dickinson (1997). Their findings showed that one of the students' main problems, when learning by e-mail, were feelings of loneliness, isolation, and lack of face-to-face contact with the teacher. There is some truth to the fact that lack of eye contact between teacher and student could create a problem both for the teacher and for the student. These feelings of communication breakdown between instructor and student have also been demonstrated in research conducted by Hara and Kling (1999) and Freisen (2002). Hundreds of media comparison studies have been conducted mainly comparing conventional face-to-face learning environment with different technology assisted environments. The purpose of

these studies has been mainly to prove the effectiveness of innovative media. However, that goal was not achieved. The frequent research result has been "no significant difference was found." (Beyth-Marom et al., 2002).

Cheng and Mao (2000) and Soyibo and Hudson (2000), on the other hand, conducted studies that reported a significant improvement in performance and attitude of students when instructional approaches involved inquiry and computer technology as compared to traditional teaching styles. Carswell et al. (2000) found that using e-mail and newsgroups versus using regular mail and telephone in a correspondence course resulted in comparable learning outcomes. Niven (2003) found that the teacher is able to develop a greater personal connection with the student through the use of e-mail than he/she is able to develop in a conventional classroom.

Gilly Salmon (2000) has suggested that there may be a number of progressive stages involved in online learning, which include access and motivation, socialisation, information exchange, knowledge construction and development. Salmon has conducted a number of studies of online learning which have resulted in the realization that online learning needs developmental time and that, from a students' perspective, it can be demanding of time and energy.

In several studies students have identified evaluation and assessment as a critical factors in helping their development as effective online collaborators. Evidence provided by Macdonald (2002) confirms that more students will participate in online collaborative activities if it is included as in assessment, and that such evaluation may also have a positive effect on the quality and coverage of the online debate itself. The issue of participation in online learning was studied by Macdonald and Twining (2002) who

found through researching student perspectives that activities which involve online communication make the issue of participation even more critical, because non-participation in an activity by one student impacts the activity of other students.

Higher Order Thinking Skills and Online Learning

Researchers have been interested in the capacity of online learning to promote higher order thinking skills. Favourable reports exist to validate the use of Web-based interactive tests to supplement traditional instruction (Hester, 1999) and hypermedia to improve reflective writing skills in high school students (Deadman, 1997). These reports and the reflection involved online learning show an increased level of higher order thinking skills exhibited by students.

In an investigation of a traditional and an online learning environment Kekonnen-Moneta and Moneta (2002) noted that the capacity of the lecture students to answer applied-conceptual questions decreased from midterm to final, while the online students grew better at understanding and answering such questions. In their conclusions they stated that this study converged with other studies (Herrington and Oliver, 1999; Hirschbul, 1999; McFarland, 1996) in indicating that carefully designed online learning modules facilitate engaging interactions with the content materials and, in turn, foster higher-order learning outcomes.

Despite overall positive research findings which are indicative of encouragement of higher order thinking skills through online learning, Bates (1995) and Burge (1994) have discussed the phenomenon of low levels of thinking and poor interaction in online environments and state that there is a great deal of significance to be placed upon well-designed mentoring and strategies to promote quality interaction. Roth (1995) showed

that the effective implementation of technology takes on meaning as part of the teachers' situated practices. In order for the higher order thinking skills to be developed there is a need for a motivational and CMC-savvy instructor to provide meaningful learning experiences in the online format.

Sense of Community in an Online Environment

The notion of the establishment of "virtual communities" has also evolved from much of the literature which exists regarding online learning. Choi and Ho (2002) used a case study approach in a university environment to conclude that according to student feedback and archived interactions, small communities of learners are indeed established through the virtual classroom activity. The data analysis led to the conclusion in this case that the tone of discussion is one of respect and encouragement. Students referred to one another by name and appear to have felt comfortable enough to share personal struggles and perspectives openly. Leading online researcher Gilly Salmon (2002) offers a precaution to such generalizations when she stated that online reflections do foster a sense of community of practice but argues it would be premature to assert that such reflections create a community in themselves.

The importance of creating an environment which is conducive to learning is paramount. Therefore, research by Richardson and Price (2002), which found that perceptions of academic quality were positively related to the more appropriate or desirable approaches to studying and their perceptions of their academic environment, has definite implications for online learning. The research findings have the capability to help educators maximize the potential of these environments.

Studies by Beyth-Marom et al. (2002) concluded that students choose the learning environment which suits them best. An instructional designer for online learning should not ask "which learning environment is best", but "which learning environment is suitable for whom", or "who will benefit more from each one of different possible components or delivery medium in the learning environment" (p.75).

Although the term "community" has broad-ranging meaning, this research indicates that the level of student success in online learning often hinges upon the feeling of belonging and contributing to the online learning group. As concluded by Beyth-Marom (2002) this invaluable sense of group knowledge-building, with all its subsequent diversity in style and interest, requires the utmost attention in the future development of online courses.

Role of Teacher in Online Learning

As in the case of any learning environment, the role of the instructor dominates much of the research concerning online learning. Various case studies and phenomenological explorations of "virtual classrooms" have reached several conclusions and recommendations for teachers who have either participated in or anticipate becoming online teachers. Macdonald and Twining (2002) explored the importance of assessment and concluded that assessment must reflect course philosophy as it is essential in creating learning opportunities at critical points and it provides a vital opportunity for feedback, helping to complete the reflective learning cycle. Salmon (2002) further demonstrated through her research that the teacher needs to prompt, encourage and enable openness, whilst acknowledging the validity of the experience. It is important that the teacher

should be alert to opportunities to comment and model ways of exploring and developing arguments.

The level of instructor participation in the online environment has also been studied. Mazzolini and Maddison (2003, p. 238) asked the question: “When facilitating asynchronous discussion forums, should online instructors be encouraged to take a prominent ‘sage on the stage’ role, a more constructivist ‘guide on the side’ role, or an ultra low profile as ‘the ghost in the wings’?” There is no shortage of anecdotal advice on how to conduct discussion forums in online education, but there appears to be very little research available so far to back up that advice. For example, Paloff and Pratt (1999, p.91), stated that instructors participate as ‘cheerleaders’, attempting to motivate deeper learning through online discussions than would usually occur in a face-to-face classroom situation, thus presenting a benefit to online learning. It is also recognized that instructor participation may be overdone and that too much participation by the instructor may reduce the amount of student–student interaction and create an unnecessary degree of reliance on the teacher (Paloff & Pratt, 2001).

The results of Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) suggest that students may contribute more to forums and pursue discussion threads at greater length if instructors intervene in a minimal way. However, they advise teachers not to generalize this conclusion as it does not necessarily follow that students' learning experience improves if the instructors are at best minimally involved in discussions

Motivation in Online learning

The issue of motivation has received consideration in most research studies relevant to online learning. In the meantime, the majority of the research has been

studied with post-secondary students, which limits strategic implications for high school students. It is clear in the traditional classroom that some students can be motivated through tests and assignments. Learners need to have a teacher who engages them online. In this respect the mere presence of teacher is vital and significant. A lot of students need the teacher to keep them online and on task (W. Sheppard, personal communication, July 29, 2003). Niven (2003) determined that motivation is key in guiding and developing an online community and in the case of online learning in creating a collaborative learning environment.

In a study conducted by Hall (2002), two-thirds of the secondary students viewed the web as merely a form of information flow and the role of communications was felt to be negligible in the learning process. It was concluded that, to motivate secondary students, learning has to matter and it has to be engaging. A high level of commitment and motivation was not shared by all of the students and some resented the amount of work they were asked to do. Based on these findings course design must consider the intended learning community in order to find motivational means appropriate for all students.

Nature of Successful Online Learner

While it is not difficult to define the unmotivated and detached learner further, research in online learning has attempted to characterize the persona of a successful online learner. Rintala (1998) studied an online learning environment and concluded that this method is more suitable for a student who is persistent, who has the ability to study independently, who is highly motivated towards learning, who is mature enough to learn according to such a method and who has good organizational ability.

Lamaster and Morley (1999) echo the sentiments of Rintala through their research which demonstrated the importance students' willingness to commit themselves and take responsibility. They state that students suited to online learning will find a great deal of interest in and derive a great deal of pleasure from the learning experience.

The importance of recognizing the significance of motivation in online learning is further discussed by researchers Marold et al. (2002) who stated that, "There are subtle differences in performance and achievement for students taking web-based courses rather than classroom-delivered sections...the student who takes the web-based course may be a significantly different type of learner...web-based courses need to be designed with optimum opportunity for achievement and performance in every area" (p. 188). The perspectives of students on this issue is also resounding as respondents in a study conducted by Kumar et al. (2002) strongly agreed (65.6%) that virtual education will be more effective for motivated and self-disciplined students.

Research findings and common sense justify the idea that if younger students are going to engage in online learning opportunities then course design will require motivational factors, competent instruction and the conveyance of self-study practices.

Chapter Three: Methodology in Case Study Action Research

In this chapter I will provide the context for my study providing a description of the school and surrounding communities. I will outline and justify my selection of research methods, study participants and data analysis procedures. The chapter will be concluded with a description of each participant in the study, along with my bracketing of personal experiences with both media literacy and online learning.

Providing the Context

This study took place within a Literary Heritage 3202 course offered in a rural high school in Newfoundland. The school has a population of approximately 900 students from twelve different rural communities with 58 teachers and support staff. The citizens of the home communities rely upon the fishing industry, the service industry and farming for their livelihoods. Several of these communities are also noted for their construction workers who commute to larger urban centers for employment.

The students involved in this particular study represent a diversity of economic backgrounds, but hold high academic achievement in common. Literary Heritage 3202 is a course designed for students intending to pursue post-secondary education. This course was an optional literature course for 95% of the registered students.

The unit on media literacy, taught via the World Wide Web, helped fulfill the objectives set forth in Literary Heritage 3202 for contemplative literature. Contemplative literature is a study of works and media which are thought-provoking and require in-depth reasoning. The structure of the course allowed students to attain the technological competencies outlined by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education's Essential Graduation Learnings. Individuals within the class expressed extreme interest

in the study and several have maintained contact with me throughout the data analysis and report writing stages of my research. Twelve out of the 21 students agreed to participate in the study. This has enabled me to compile an extremely thorough description of the thoughts, feelings and perspectives that these students have constructed regarding both media literacy and online learning.

Describing the Research Design

This study aims to identify themes from data collected from secondary students in two fields which have not been extensively explored high school settings. Media literacy and online learning will impact high school students heavily in the future. The students' opinions, values and experiences regarding the media which pervade their lives should contribute to the models and practices that will be implemented in high school classrooms in the future.

Action Research in Practice

Action research is well defined by John Elliot (1991), who claimed that “action research is ‘the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it’” (p. 69). This was clearly my intention in this study. The lack of research rigour as indicated by Andersen (1992) and Gurnawardera and McIsaac (1992) in the fields of media literacy and online learning can be benefited by a teacher action research study which combines elements from both topics.

Lewin (1946, 1948) codified the action research process into four main stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In order to complete the cyclical process prescribed by Schön (1987), the researcher must also put insight gained from the reflection back into practice. The planning, observing and reflecting formed the data

collection process in this study, while the action will result from the analysis of themes and views possessed by these students regarding the relevant issues.

Cohen et al. (2000, p. 79) indicated that the characteristics of successful action research include context specificity, participants as researchers, reflection on practice, collaboration, the promotion of praxis and equality, and stakeholder research. I adhered to all of these characteristics throughout the course of this project. The notion of reflection and collaboration formed the basis for much of the curriculum design and implementation while themes regarding praxis and equality resonated throughout several of the postings and interviews contributed by the participants of the study. This was further enhanced by my own professional reflections upon the process and progress of online learning in this specific context. This measure is justified by Elliot (1978, pp. 355-356) who claimed that action research combines diagnosis with reflection, focusing on practical issues that have been identified by participants and which are somehow both problematic yet capable of being changed.

Wild (1996) argued that interpretivist and developmental studies (rather than analytical and comparative research) are likely to shed light on the area of online learning while Metz (1994) insisted that action research is most useful in that “the role of the researcher in action research is partly that of participant observer, which has special qualities in the online medium as the researcher is fully involved” (p. 202). Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) stated that action research allows us to give a reasoned justification of our educational work to others because we can show how the evidence we have gathered and the critical self-reflection we have done have helped us to create a developed, tested and critically examined rationale for what we are doing. By closely investigating student

perspectives of online learning and media education in conjunction with my own professional judgments I strived to create guidelines for future practice which have been “tried and true.” Newman (2000) makes a connection between case study and action research methods by claiming that careful examination of an individual student or a small group of students, can be the basis of a teacher/action research project. Here, the point of the work is to learn from the situation how to act in it to discover the kinds of decisions we make and to think about the theoretical reasons for making them. Evidence can consist of personal reflections, lesson plans, students' work, student/parent/colleague interviews, etc. In case study work the gaze is on attempting to uncover the assumptions associated with action research, which are driving our teaching; to learn from the learners how to make teaching a learning enterprise.

Cresswell (1998) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. As a researcher I commenced my study with the desire to “build a complex, holistic picture, analyze words, report detailed views of informants, and conduct the study in a natural setting” (p. 16). The investigation of students’ participation in an online learning environment and their perspectives relating to this experience, provide the researcher with a series of themes with the potential to lead to the amelioration of online learning in particular contexts. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon that is not fully understood. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively.

Another point leading to the selection of a qualitative approach to research states that one should “use a qualitative study because of the need to present a detailed view of the topic. There should be a specific interest in writing and bringing him or herself into the study. The researcher serves a role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an ‘expert’ who passes judgments on participants” (p. 18).

My Class as a Case Study

Nisbet and Watt (1984) state that a case study explores “a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle” (p.72). This study looks at how one particular class makes a transition to the online learning environment. The study itself is designed to illustrate general principles regarding both online learning and media studies. Other case study methods evident in this study include a report on the complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance (Cohen et al., 2000). The unique instance here involves one class’ transition to an online learning format. Through observing and participating in the study my goal is to provide a detailed account of the human interactions and events that surfaced throughout the study. From these observations I hope to learn from my own actions in order to develop teaching practices and techniques which would help me make improve my teaching in online settings.

By creating an online environment meant to teach media literacy objectives I am exploring two relatively new trends in ELA curriculum development. Through observing this particular context and the ensuing student products I am investigating “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”(Yin, 1994, p. 13).

The data collection phase of this project was extensive as it aimed to reflect the belief that “a case study involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 123). The principles of Yin (1989) were followed as I compiled and analyzed five of his six components of case study data: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artifacts. I commenced by looking at the archival records of each student (student cumulative files) in an attempt to gain insight into the nature of these learners. Throughout the study I engaged in direct observation and participant observation as I served as teacher and active participant in the online discussion board. I used direct observation through my analysis of student postings to the discussion forum. The physical artifacts were gathered in the form of the student-produced final multimedia products.

The data collection procedures were also influenced by the work of Stake (1995) who believed that there should be four forms of data analysis and interpretation in case study research. In categorical aggregation, the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge. In direct interpretation the case study researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it without looking for multiple instances. It is a process of pulling the data apart and putting it back together again. The researcher establishes patterns and looks for a correspondence between two or more categories. It was in the data analysis stage of the study where I developed a series of themes from the abundance of postings and interview transcriptions

for each student. Stake refers to case study analysis of themes as the “development of issues.”

Experiencing Data Collection

The data collection process for this study was entirely qualitative in nature. My methods of collecting data loosely followed the suggestion of Hoepfl (1997) who claimed that the two prevailing forms of data collection associated with qualitative inquiry are interviews and observation. However, I also employed other forms of data for my analysis by including multiple sources of information audio-visual material, in the form of student-produced web sites, documents and reports (Cresswell, 1998). A case study involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case (p. 123).

My data collection involved the two-month online observation of this group as they participated in the study. Through this experience I gathered the online content that was generated through electronic mail, the discussion forum and their final projects. The final project was a web site that followed the various media literacy objectives and skills that were attained throughout the unit of study. I also explored the provincial documentation which has been developed throughout the restructuring process of Newfoundland and Labrador’s English Language Arts curriculum.

In concluding my data collection stage I distributed a survey (See Appendix F) to the students. The survey explored the values, attitudes and beliefs of the students concerning online learning and media literacy. Students were invited to elaborate upon their surveys in an interview which was conducted one month after both their experience with the study and the distribution of marks for the course. While five of the students

participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews another three of the students requested online or phone interviews. These interviews (See Appendix G) follow a semi-structured format and the transcript data was stored in electronic format on a password-protected computer. The online interview reflected both an accommodation for my study and a preference for expressing their opinions in a written fashion.

Clustering of Themes

While the data collection process entailed qualities of phenomenology through the observational techniques which were used extensively while empirical data was gathered in a naturalistic setting, (Cohen et al., 2000), it was the data analysis procedure which relied most heavily upon phenomenological techniques. By participating in the online learning environment I entered the field of perception of the participants and gained invaluable insight into how they “experience, live and display the phenomenon of being an online learner” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 31). By analyzing the data I was actively looking for the meaning of the participant’s experiences.

The data analysis procedure itself was an arduous task as the two-month study accumulated well over 300 pieces of data. Using Ethnograph 5.0 I proceeded to cluster themes from this data which reflects the statement that “meanings are accorded to phenomena by both the researcher and the participants; the process of research, therefore was hermeneutic, uncovering meanings” (Lecompte and Preissle, 1993, pp. 31-32). I coded the data based on themes that emerged through the students’ postings in relation to media literacy and their post-study questionnaires and interviews with respect to online learning techniques. As a researcher I adhered to Creswell’s (1998) principle which states that, “Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of

reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. The researcher also sets aside all prejudgments and biases by bracketing his or her experiences and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience" (p. 52). As the coding procedure and the themes emerged I realized that my study had indeed succeeded in answering several of the questions that I had initially set out to explore.

Applying and Deriving Themes

In using the qualitative research software package entitled the Ethnograph 5.0 (Qualis Research Associates, 2003), I used inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerged out of the data that I had collected (Patton, 1990). In coding the data I followed the ideal described by Lloyd-Jones (2003) who described the creativity which was necessary for qualitative analysis. Lloyd-Jones identified the challenge as the placement of the raw data into logical, meaningful categories; to examine them in a holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others.

I commenced the data analysis procedure by identifying the themes which emerged from the raw data in a process referred to as "open coding" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). During open coding, I identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed were grouped. The goal of such a procedure is to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories that form a preliminary framework for analysis. Words, phrases and events that appeared to be similar were grouped into the same category. Throughout the course of the analysis these categories were modified and replaced (Cohen et al., 2000).

The final phase of my data analysis involved placing each relevant theme in relation to the research question which was effectively answered. The result was a description of an online learning experience of a group of high school students concerning media literacy.

Ensuring Reliability

There are several procedures which establish verification in qualitative research (Cresswell, 1998). An important part of insuring the credibility for the findings from my study was the focus of rigorous and detailed strategies for analyzing and coding my data. Observation sessions lasted one to two hours.

The interview following the observation lasted about an hour for each student. Different kinds of observations were conducted. Three different kinds of data were analyzed (observation, interview and document review data) simultaneously while data were collected. The analysis was triangulated in terms of methodologies, people, and time (Silverman, 1996; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, each interview transcript and interpretation were validated by informants. Adelman (1980) refers to this process as respondent validation.

Rationalizing the Involvement of this Particular Group

For the past two academic years I have taught the course entitled Literary Heritage 3202. This course explored five literary modes. The objectives deal with a view of literature study being static and pre-determined. The premise of the course is to teach students a series of motifs and elements of five historical modes of literature. The students must develop the capacity to identify these elements within and throughout examples of literature that they come in contact with. The 2002-2003 school year

represented the last year that this element of the former English Literature and Language Program of studies would be included in the Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum. Therefore, the students in this particular group would represent the last set of students to experience the former style of English Literature and Language in this province. As new courses and objectives have been introduced in our secondary English Language Arts courses these “tail end” students have not been impacted. Also, these students did not have the opportunity to gain technological competencies through ELA courses.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 39-43) purposive sampling enables a full scope of issues to be explored. This information helped me choose this group for two main reasons. The first reason is the fact that the emphasis upon media literacy skills has not been formally taught to these particular students. Their literary training has been entirely linked to traditional writing skills and literary analysis. With this in mind the students were bringing only their personal experiences to this media literacy study, not previous experiences with media literacy education.

The second major factor in deciding to study this particular group is the fact that they have also experienced a former English Literature program which did not endorse expression and communication using current technologies. The updated English curriculum movement in this province endorses the integration of a wide range of communication and information technology (ICT) in English classrooms (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, p. 88). As these students progressed to their final year of high school it is possible they have experienced ICT in other courses. However, it would be their first experience with the integration of ICT and English Language Arts.

The study of contemplative literature allowed me to integrate samples of more current forms of media which are not fixed in curriculum and textbooks. The online format was adopted for this unit of study as it allowed students to examine more interactive and current forms of contemplative literature.

Maintaining an Ethical Stance

Educational authorities were presented with a copy of the ethics approval document (see Appendix B) and were requested to provide permission for this study to be conducted in the relevant school. The school principal and the district director of education promptly provided permission to embark upon the study, subject to the ethical handling of all participants and issues involved.

Students were provided with a detailed letter outlining the research (see Appendix C) and two consent forms (see Appendices D and E) prior to the commencement of the study. One consent form provided me with the students' consent to contribute to the study while the other consent form required that the parents or guardians grant permission to their children to participate in this study. Because I was responsible for determining grades for this particular course I did not receive these permission forms until all grades had been inputted into the school and Department of Education database for final marks. As a precautionary measure each form was submitted to the school principal, who signed each document for verification purposes.

Twelve students agreed to participate in this study. They will be described in the next section. There were eight females and four males.

The online procedures for protecting the confidentiality of participants involved their sending me electronic communications via their school-provided e-mail service and

posting to a password-protected discussion forum that was monitored closely by officials at the school district's Information Technology division. Thus no outsiders had access to their online interactions.

The students each provided me with a pseudonym which would further ensure confidentiality in the actual reporting of the data analysis. This pseudonym was also documented on the student consent form. The choices of pseudonyms for the individuals were interesting and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

I personally transcribed the data which emerged from the interview and survey. I also recorded and stored all data that was posted to the online discussion forum or sent to me via electronic mail. The data collection was sorted and stored on a password-protected computer.

Sketching the Participants

In this section I will provide a rough sketch of each particular student. This will contribute to the depth of analysis while following case study practices which enrich this report.

Blind Bunga LeCoon is an honours student who resides in the community of the school catchments area. She comes from a two-income family and exhibits positive study and work habits. Blind Bunga LeCoon has two younger siblings. During her final year of high school Blind Bunga LeCoon completed two Advanced Placement courses with the highest possible academic standing. She has evolved from a rather quiet individual to an outgoing sociable person. Her academic focus tends to be specifically arts oriented. Blind Bunga LeCoon's creativity (or eccentricities) surfaced during her final year of high school. As the year progressed she used her creativity constructively

by becoming a very active participant in academic projects which required unique perspectives. Blind Bunga LeCoon's competitive nature was also well known by her fellow classmates. It became an endearing quality to many people in the class.

Grammatically Correct Princess is a very motivated individual who worked diligently throughout the school year in order to achieve graduation with a very high academic standing. She is a very outspoken individual who contributes quite effectively to all class discussions. Grammatically Correct Princess comes from a two-income family and she has one younger sibling. Throughout the study Grammatically Correct Princess displayed a high sense of pride in the fact that she could contribute to a meaningful educational study. This genuine interest in academia has led Grammatically Correct Princess to choose an honours post-secondary program which is in the discipline of the Arts.

Lassie is an extremely loyal and obedient student. She is extremely academically motivated and she brings an abundance of technological expertise to her studies. Lassie has one younger sibling and she comes from a dual income family. Although she claims to be inhibited by public speaking opportunities, Lassie's classroom contributions in the traditional and online context were exemplary. Lassie has also chosen the Arts as she has enrolled at a Fine Arts Post-Secondary Program.

Mayor Quimby is a stellar student who finished first in his class and was valedictorian. Mayor Quimby brought prior online learning experience in a different discipline which provided an interesting factor. Throughout the year Mayor Quimby maintained a high level of work ethic. Throughout the study he used his dry sense of humour within his postings and his questionnaire and interview. However, his humour

tended to create serious and meaningful insights regarding both online learning and media literacy.

Cinderella Barbie-doll is an average student who comes from a dual income family. She is an only child and she worked hard in this course. Cinderella Barbie-doll changed from a quiet and reserved student to an outspoken individual who contributed quite well to class discussions. Her online postings were rather well developed and the views presented in her responses were informed and insightful. Unfortunately Cinderella Barbie-doll did not complete all of her postings as an illness prevented her from attending class for the last part of the school year.

Anne of Green Gut is a very unique and interesting student. While her academic standing indicates that she is an average student her capacity to contribute and communicate is overwhelming and she was a very positive influence in the online and traditional setting. Anne of Green Gut excelled when it came to relating curriculum material to popular culture. She showed the most significant improvement in academic achievement and input when we moved to the online learning format concerning different forms of media.

Frisky Devito is a member of a two-income family and he has two younger siblings. Like Anne of Green Gut, Frisky Devito is very articulate and insightful. He has an amazing capacity for information regarding a lot of different forms of media. He is extremely interested in music and a lot of his postings relayed insight gained from his exposure to the music industry. Frisky Devito's interest in this study was obvious and he found a way to instill several of his values concerning world politics and popular culture

into his postings. Frisky Devito is well versed in technology and conveyed several attitudes concerning this interest throughout his questionnaire and interview.

Max Power is definitely the quietest person in the class. While being an average student he does convey a high level of respect and punctuality in his work. Max Power was one of the first people to send his work to me via e-mail. He is a very peaceful person who was not intimidated by the transfer to the online format. However, he maintained his quality of brevity throughout most of his postings.

Suejojo comes from a dual income family. She is also a quiet student who produced very interesting data in this study through the emergence of her online persona. While being quiet and intuitive in class she posted very aggressive and opinionated postings in the online forum. At first she was extremely apprehensive about posting her responses. However she posted with relative ease and confidence by the end of the study. Suejojo's pride in her involvement in this study has been obvious since the school year ended as she has agreed to participate in all post-study data collection procedures.

Athena is an interesting student who finished her previous literature course with one of the highest grades in the school. However, at first she seemed to be intimidated and would not willingly contribute her opinions. As the year progressed Athena became very outspoken. This came through in several of her postings and she actually organized the year-end class party in the community. Athena is an insightful young lady whose previous exposure to online learning inhibited her initial online participation in this study. However, as she witnessed the role of the students and my feedback she embraced the discussion forum option with full force.

Fluffy comes from a dual income family. She is a very diligent worker in the classroom. She is a very genuine person who maintains a quiet disposition during class. Fluffy is a very mechanical writer and she enjoyed posting her written responses to the online forum. Like Athena she had a prior negative experience with online learning but she remained open to the potential of online learning throughout this study.

Gandalf the Blue is an extremely interesting character who worked hard in his course. He received good marks in all of his courses and he is currently enrolled in post-secondary studies. Gandalf the Blue was quiet in class but was always a willing participant in any creative or unique endeavours that the course entailed.

The Role of the Action Researcher

I have been teaching English, French and Technology Education for the past five years. I was born in Newfoundland and raised in Marystown, which is a town of approximately 7000 people. My teaching experiences have been diverse as I have taught in two small schools in rural communities on the Avalon Peninsula and I am currently teaching in one of the province's largest high schools. My interest in online learning was derived from my witnessing of the implementation of several distance education courses in the smaller schools which I have been affiliated with. I graduated from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1998 with my Bachelor of Education with training in Secondary Methods. This educational training helped me develop an interest in media literacy and online learning through the extensive training which was provided regarding the new English curriculum during this time.

Throughout my first five years in the educational field I have been involved in the integration of the new curriculum in English Language Arts. This implementation has

entailed extensive training in new forms of literacy, practical implications for ICT in the Language Arts classroom and an investigation of the role of assessment in this new curriculum. This experience has helped me develop thoughts and views relative to these issues which will be elaborated upon in my bracketing section. My role in this study served a dual purpose. On one hand I was the teacher. The duties involved in this role included the curriculum design for the study, the technological assistance and the pedagogical practices that were required to ensure that the students achieved the goals and directives of the course objectives. As a researcher I embraced the notion of participant observation (Cohen et al., 2000). I reflected upon my actions as a teacher and investigated the ensuing relations which were arising from the online setting. These reflective practices and the resulting cycle of action constitute action research (Schön, 1987). The qualitative researcher is the key instrument in the design process, continually deploying reflexivity and evaluative skills to data analysis and to the decisions concerning the direction of the next step in the study (Lloyd-Jones, 2003).

Bracketing

In this research I attempted to follow the phenomenological idea that “The researcher also sets aside all prejudgements and biases by bracketing his or her experiences and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 52). This idea stems from the idea put forth by Husserl who believed that we are asked to look beyond the details of everyday life to the essences underlying them. Husserl prescribes putting the world in brackets or freeing ourselves from our usual ways of perceiving the world. This became known as

bracketing or epoché (p. 24). I will include my own views concerning media literacy and online learning in this section.

My Interest in Media Literacy and Online Learning

In 1993, during my final year of high school, my Religion teacher asked me to write a research paper concerning ethics in news reporting. He handed me a copy of Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* and I began a wonderful journey of critical awareness which has followed me throughout my teaching, post-secondary and now graduate career. While I do recognize the left-wing approach adopted by Chomsky I still appreciate the ability that this text had in developing a critical lens through which I now view most media.

In 1998, as I was preparing to enter the field of education I experienced further studies in media education and I began to rekindle an interest in notions of media literacy. Instructors of my methods courses introduced me to the movement that the *Atlantic Province's English Foundation* was making towards the inclusion of media literacy and technological integration into English Language Arts.

In the five years which have passed I have become a teacher who actively endorses the ideas of critical awareness and media literacy throughout the curriculum. I voice my endorsement of the place of media education in our current curriculum to my students, peers and educational authorities.

As a citizen I feel empowered by the skills that have been fostered by my previous educators. Through my study I hope to provide solid verification of the potential that media literacy possesses for secondary students.

Despite being a teacher who advocates the use of technology in the classroom I have met the idea of online learning with a lot of skepticism. As a teacher in two rural schools I witnessed and experienced the implementation of distance education courses. I developed a genuine concern that such issues as technological problems, lack of instructor participation and communicative miscues would impact the students' achievements negatively and hinder their chance of success in the course.

Another item of concern that I possessed regarding online learning is the importance of student motivation in online learning. Therefore, if they are provided with an opportunity to learn via a method which does not include face-to-face interaction and communication the average student will slip into the abyss of academic failure.

In conducting this research I aimed to get a glimpse into students' perspectives relating to online learning. While most of the literature either deals with the success of university students in online learning or the benefits that are present in virtual learning environments a lot of research fails to recognize the value of high school students' opinions regarding online learning. After all it is becoming more and more of a reality that high school students in this province will eventually experience one of their courses in an online format.

Chapter Four: The Clustering Stage

This section will discuss the themes which resulted from the clustering of data.

The first section will be a detailed description of the online learning format. I will discuss the transition from my traditional classroom context to the online web site. In the second section I will compare the evolving learnings of the students to curricular outcomes recommended by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education. The third section will look at themes which emerged from the data regarding the students' views of online learning as an effective means of delivering media literacy objectives.

Looking at Initial Questions of Inquiry

The aim of this research was to provide answers to several questions relating to both media literacy and online learning phenomena. Several themes emerged which responded to but were not limited to the following originally proposed questions:

- Can students formulate, critique and publish their own multimedia products and develop a sense of critical awareness of Internet and other media messages in an online learning environment?
- How can online learning outcomes and media literacy outcomes best be assessed?
- What are the most appropriate forms of assessment for high school students learning media literacy online?
- What types of supports are required to improve success for more learners in online and off-line learning settings?
- What understandings of the potential and impact of online learning can be learned during a teacher action research study?

Several themes also emerged which I had not anticipated. Such items as the significance that previous experiences with online learning had upon these students and students' perspectives of North American news agencies resonated clearly throughout their online discussion forum postings and their final interviews and questionnaires.

A Look at the Classroom Setup

Physical Context Alteration

For the first six months of the academic school year the students studied Literary Heritage 3202 in the context of my classroom. Aside from the occasional group project, desks were organized in row-formation while I assumed the position at the front of the classroom. My main teaching methods were lecture format, note-taking and group discussions. All students were situated in the same physical room and I had established a seating plan.

The online format for learning shifted from the structure and confines of the classroom to the library and computer lab. Students were free to choose either location, as they were both in close proximity to one another. I was situated at a personal computer in the library and a fellow teacher assisted in the monitoring and supervision of the students. Students tended to sit by their friends but the classroom atmosphere was still influenced heavily by the quiet, conformity-based model that constituted the former classroom. The students would sit quietly in front of their computer screens and type responses to the questions. A routine was established after two to three classes whereby groups of students would automatically go to the same computers and work with minimal verbal discussion with one another. This was parallel to the seating plan of my traditional classroom and depicts this particular group of students as true "creatures of habit."

Virtual Discussion and Interaction

My role of teacher in the transition from the traditional to the online format was most impacted by the amount of time that I spent replying to student responses and questions. While my class time was spent replying to postings the students did not hesitate to e-mail or post technical questions despite my physical presence in the class. I also noticed a high level of multitasking during class time. Students were clearly well-versed in the use of the personal computer and as I watched from my perch, I found several people were in the practice of communicating with fellow classmates via Microsoft Messenger. I did not attempt to control or manage this virtual equivalence to “idle classroom chatter” as I did not see any reduction in the amount of work completed during the regular class time frame. I did notice that the class-time multitasking resulted in more questions being posted during after-hours and in the evening. This inevitably increased the time that I was required to work at the course as I was certainly more accessible in the online format.

Virtual Notion of Classroom Management

In the traditional classroom context this group of students was very easy to manage when provided with a set of high academic standards and clear expectations. The only discipline issue that I had throughout the year was actually during the online unit of study. Students were invited to make informal postings to a thread which was entitled “The Watercooler.” (This thread will receive more attention later in this chapter). Suejojo, who is an extremely quiet individual, got into a verbal argument with Frisky Devito via the discussion board. Students were trying to establish a time for a class get-together before the end of the school year. As the written insults were traded back and

forth it finally climaxed with the following commentary by Suejojo: “And for those, for example, Frisky Devito, who seemingly could care less about this little get together, can obviously get over that fact that it doesn't fit into their schedule. I mean, it's just a class, right? Who needs an after hours party with their classmates” (Lotus Forum Posting, June 10, 2003). I promptly ended the thread because I felt that the tone of the posting was offensive and I strongly suspected that this could destroy the mutual respect that was present throughout the majority of the online discussion board. It was very interesting how these quiet and compliant individuals engaged in verbal dispute in the online discussion forum setting. Suejojo immediately replied remorsefully to my evening posting and met me the next day with a face-to-face apology for her online behaviour.

An Emerging Cluster of Relevant Themes

While analyzing the data I recognized a set of recurring themes which dominated a lot of the data collected from these high school students. From these themes, as well as an application of objectives prescribed by the English Language Arts Foundation document, I will present recommendations and conclusions which could be utilized in future opportunities for media education activities within online learning environments.

Throughout the student online postings and the post-study interview and questionnaires several key points emerged relative to media literacy and online learning. The themes, which related to media literacy, involved the illustration of student values and attitudes regarding media. Students' opinions regarding advertising, Internet news coverage, online government agencies and online television features, as well as the presentation of a lot of personal values and beliefs held by these students were all revealed in this study.

The themes which emerged concerning online learning reflected a desire to reveal experiences from past online learning experiences, definitions of the notion of teacher feedback, practical advice for teachers and students who are about to embark upon an online course, and student perspectives on the role of an online instructor.

Arriving At Informed Personal Responses

Responses Heightened in Times of Unrest

The English Language Arts Foundation Guide states: “By the end of Grade 12 students should be able to make informed personal responses to increasingly challenging print and media texts and reflect on their responses” (p. 27). It states clearly that upon graduation students should be able to “examine how texts work to reveal and produce ideologies and positions, and examine how media texts construct notions of roles, behaviour, culture and reality” (p. 29). This part of the analysis will demonstrate the fulfillment of curricular outcomes as defined by the aforementioned document. The second part of this analysis will shape emergent themes relative to student notions of media literacy as presented through their postings.

The module which addressed online news agencies provided the students with four international news websites. The four sites were chosen to represent the news coverage of five different nations. As a point of interest the link chosen to represent the Middle Eastern Arabic media coverage became a casualty of the Allied forces demolition of media outlets at the earliest point of the conflict in April, 2003. The students were not notified of this development as I felt it could possibly influence their judgment of the other news sites based on national affiliation. The other five sites were strategically chosen to reflect news agencies which were crown-operated (CBC and BBC) and

privately-controlled (CNN, United Press International, Reuters). Students were also invited to check out other international sites but reacted strongly when they noticed the Arab news sites had been eliminated from the World Wide Web. The news page also included optional links to independently operated news sites like “Straightgoods” (<http://www.straightgoods.ca>) and the Global Network for Democratic Media (<http://www.mediachannel.org>). Using the information provided within these sites the students were probed as to how these texts construct the notions of roles and reality. Questions for the module were presented so as to elicit the most open student opinions (see Appendix A). The issues entailed in investigating online news sources elicited responses from students like those of Grammatically Correct Princess, who claimed that the pictures broadcast from Iraq during the war “were often subject to their own type of bias” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003). Mayor Quimby further depicts a picture of media bias when he states that “The networks, particularly American news agencies, tend to use only select articles and clips to highlight the tyranny of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and the Baath Party in Iraq, making the invading American and English forces look like heroes” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003). The ideas that both Grammatically Correct Princess and Mayor Quimby have formulated are based on the information provided on the prescribed web sites, in order for students to arrive at a set of ideologies and positions regarding the issue of media bias. For example, Mayor Quimby points to word choice and uses textual analysis of the news coverage when he makes reference to the references of “Allied forces ‘steam-rolling’ through the Iraqi countryside” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003). Mayor Quimby’s identification of the term “steam-rolling” from within the text of the CNN web site displays an ability to

synthesize previous study of diction and word choice in ELA study. He also uses current affairs, in combination with the available classroom content, to analyze the coverage when he provides the example that “the Information Minister declares that American forces have been ‘vanquished’ and there will be a ‘swift Iraqi victory’.” Through the development of his posting Mayor Quimby exhibits reflection upon his own interpretations when he claims that, “I never knew that both sides of a violent conflict could be winning the same territory at the same time.” The level of sarcasm contained within this statement shows a higher level of thought and a combination of information and humour. Students in this particular study showed that the provision of an avenue for expression (i.e. the online forum) will allow for a focused opportunity to develop and validate opinions. The discussion forum and the online web sites provided both a source of information and vehicle of expression for these students.

Frisky Devito contributes to the critical issue of biased reporting when he mentions the fact that, in his opinion, “over here we are shown the war as a good thing while the people in Iraq, their opinions are more likely to be found on the British news. It's pretty much a different war and we are seeing it as the Americans invading their country [the Iraqis] which would never be shown on our news” (interview, July 27, 2003). Frisky Devito has used his experience and exposure to this media literacy unit to formulate his own opinion based on the comparative nature of the prescribed analysis.

The module encouraged the students to explore and investigate the news coverage of each respective country. Once again, Frisky Devito and his classmates have investigated the importance of text and media constructions in order to examine how they reveal ideologies and more clearly position viewers, especially as the texts related to

ongoing crises which occurred at the time of this study. The responses of the students to the news agency module were surprising and refreshing. Mayor Quimby retrospectively contributed during his interview, “I liked the way it related best to current affairs with the analysis of different news sources. Especially with the recent war in Iraq, we were able to see how literature can relate to our current world” (June 12, 2003). By referring to news and media publications as “literature”, Mayor Quimby displays an appreciation and level of respect for media literacy as a discipline found within an educational setting. This expanded definition of literature illustrates the following requirement stated by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education:

Students must be prepared to deal with the growing access to and exponential growth of information, expanding perceptions of time and space in a global context, new ways to interact and interconnect with others, and a technologically oriented environment characterized by continuous, rapid change (p.88).

Interpreting Corporate Publications

The advertising module asked students to explore the power of language and technology in online advertising. Students used their viewing and exploration of the four web sites in order to arrive at a detailed posting regarding the importance of language in advertising. While the students were encouraged to be specific, Blind Bunga LeCoon made the generalized statement that “It is difficult to resist the desire for a product [Nike sneakers] that is described so flawlessly and seems to guarantee that we will be satisfied with our lot in life for a while after purchasing it. However, those less skeptical must remember that the portrayal of these products is not necessarily for the benefit of the consumer, but to a much greater extent the benefit of the company” (Lotus Forum

Posting, June 01 , 2003). Blind Bunga LeCoon's posting is indicative of an attempt to understand the potential benefits of manipulating language. While the power of language is something which is extremely important in the study of literature, students questioned a person's motive in using specific words and phrases through their exposure to online advertising.

Cinderella Barbie Doll identifies the use of language in advertising and its relation to the potential audience when she illustrates that "the language that is used attract teens will certainly not be the same language used to attract adults or seniors."(e-mail to Dale Lambe, May 08, 2003). Cinderella Barbie Doll's claim is reflective of another attempt to contemplate for whom the development of particular phrases and the inclusion of particular words is aimed. Fluffy collaborated to this idea in describing the advertising of vehicles. She describes the advertisement and impact when she says, "It causes the consumer to feel unsafe unless their 'lives are riding on Michelin Tires' endorsed by Ford. As well, some of the Ford vehicles are 'Special Editions', lasting a 'Limited Time Only'. This causes a sense of urgency among consumers to buy before it's too late" (Lotus Forum Posting, May 20, 2003). This response was to my question that requested the students to choose their own product to analyze based on their findings from the athletic apparel web sites. Fluffy's posting exposes the power of language in advertising. Diction is so important in literature and Fluffy has attempted to show how word choice is equally as effective in advertising.

Blind Bunga LeCoon, Cinderella Barbie Doll and Fluffy addressed the issue of the potential power and manipulation of language within advertising. However, it was Frisky Devito who offered the changing criteria of advertising now that it has entered an

online medium when he offers the suggestion regarding one site that “The graphics on the site are very minimal, allowing for easy navigation, but, this could also be viewed as a weakness, because some people only like what they can see.” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 26, 2003). Frisky Devito’s claim is indicative of changing criteria for effective advertising based on the transference of corporation’s promotions to an online medium. An analysis of Frisky Devito’s statement reveals that graphics have become an integral part of the advertising industry as a result of the interests of the Internet audience. This adds to the notion of changing forms of literacy to include a wider variety of texts and multimedia productions. Frisky Devito also uses his personal background in technology, along with the guided analysis of the advertising module to arrive at personal conclusions and philosophies regarding the prevalence of online advertising in today’s society.

Becoming Critically Aware of Online Government Agencies

While students generally looked at the technological elements involved in the tourism module a few students explored the notion of Internet tourist possibilities with a little more critical analysis. Mayor Quimby concluded through his study that, “the Internet provides a great advantage to those in the tourism industry who choose to use it” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 26, 2003) while it was Athena who fully explored the tourism module with a sense of critical awareness when she responded in her interview that, “I liked how they put everything together to like pitch the sale to potential tourists. Like how they put everything together, the pictures and the words they use, where they placed it to, what it meant. I don't know I thought it was pretty cool how they put it all together (July 27, 2003). It is the ability to look at how “they put it all together” which forms the basic premise for media literacy.

Surfing through the Modules

One theme which stemmed from the data was the impact and interest generated by the modules of study regarding media literacy. As clearly indicated by the *English Language Arts Foundation Document*, “Learning experiences will involve students in examining the role and influence of mass media and other visual arts in their lives” (p. 40). In this module the students’ responses regarding the news, government agencies, advertising and television on the World Wide Web represented the successful conveyance of several objectives outlined in the new curriculum. Each of the following sections represents the students’ views and perspectives regarding each module.

Evaluating Internet News Coverage

The theme conveyed by the students regarding news coverage echoed the point of view that, “Media and how they basically write the stories that they want us to hear and meanwhile more important stories to us may not be what they are wanting us to view”(Fluffy, Lotus Forum Posting, June 12, 2003). This supports the new curriculum initiative which states that “Students’ viewing experiences should help them to develop a repertoire of strategies that will enable them to negotiate meaning from an ever-growing array of mass media...Critical response helps students see themselves as free to agree with the text, or to actively disagree with it. Thinking critically about text will help students to recognize and evaluate human experience as well as the text in which those experiences are represented” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, pp. 41-42). The students used the forum as an analytical tool for interpreting five different international news sites. While I was initially wary of this section by holding the presumption that high school students would lack interest in the news, it was actually

quite interesting to see the level of depth in their postings and the favourable view that these students had on this module throughout the post-study data collection stage. As Mayor Quimby indicated in his post-study interview, “Personally, I only started watching news coverage in the past few months, so that module enriched the way I see news and read reports” (July 28, 2003).

As a teacher I have an ideal as to what constitutes critical awareness. As students become more informed they attain the ability to question why things are constructed the way they appear. Several of the postings exhibited a high level of developing a foundation for information and a keen sense of critical awareness as the students provided various personal opinions relating to news coverage. Fluffy makes the claim that viewing the four different sites helped her formulate the following perspective: “We can clearly see that propaganda gives the reader a feeling that they make their own decisions but in reality they are believing what they are told by corporate America” (Lotus Forum, June 12, 2003). While Fluffy’s opinion may not hold any credence for a lot of readers she has used the information gained from her exploration of the four media web sites in order to arrive at her conclusion. This is another representation of how the previous knowledge, in combination with the individual’s system of beliefs lead to the development of critical awareness.

Expressing Global Concerns and Pointing a Finger

While my professional definition of critical awareness entails the expression of values using information, the timing of the study provided the students with an avenue for expressing grave concerns about global issues relating to the United States-led war on Iraq. A strong sense of anti-war and, inevitably, anti-American media sentiment was a

recurrent theme throughout several of the postings on the discussion forum as students used the forum to discuss and contemplate the role of the key players in the war. The module was conducted during the time that George Bush was calling an official end to the 2003 conflict in Iraq. This resulted in such comments as, "The news sources section was a good way for us students to find out what's really going on in the world, not just the semi-truthful stories we are spoonfed by American media." (Frisky Devito, interview, July 27, 2003). Frisky Devito speaks with a lot of conviction throughout his postings and his post-study interview when it comes to media coverage of major world events. Neutrality in the teaching profession is an impossibility. Our values and morals become a part of our professional persona and students probe for teacher meaning and attitudes. In trying to elicit genuine student beliefs in issues I make an attempt to present both points of view but I recognize that the imposition of teacher values is inevitable. My efforts to achieve a minimal level of neutrality during the war in Iraq included the simple direction of students to web sites and open-ended questioning techniques which did not present my viewpoint. In the meantime, students felt a need to discuss and elaborate upon their own views of the war and the media coverage of this event. The values conveyed by the students constitute another theme from the data analysis, which will be discussed later in this report.

Grammatically Correct Princess's response to the media perspective that we were provided with regarding the perceived fall of Sadaam Hussein was expressed in her usual articulate fashion in the following passage: "I can think of no better example to explain this type of media bias than the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. Some television stations reported that thousands of cheering Iraqis had toppled the

infamous leader's edifice, while others stated (probably more accurately) that an undetermined few Iraqi revolutionists had been responsible for the breakdown” (Grammatically Correct Princess, Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003). In using direct references from the five web sites Grammatically Correct Princess shows why she is questioning the validity of several media web sites. Despite indicating a clear bias against the American led invasion of Iraq in previous postings Grammatically Correct Princess simply compares the reporting of different international news sources in determining her example of media bias. Later in this same posting Grammatically Correct Princess allows a little of her opinion to show through the grammatical use of quotation marks when she states that “Even “embedded journalists” from Reuters may not have been able to report on everything that they saw.” (Grammatically Correct Princess, Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003). While Grammatically Correct Princess is expressing a belief regarding the use of “embedded journalists” during the conflict, she uses punctuation to accentuate her take on this practice. This intended dig at the American government is an indication of Grammatically Correct Princess’s strong personality which was also prevalent throughout her face-to-face dealings throughout this study.

Sporadically throughout the postings the students expressed opinions on the issues of sensationalism and journalistic integrity. While these statements did not dominate the postings it was interesting to note the positions of Grammatically Correct Princess and Mayor Quimby who, once again, managed to implement a little more of their online wit. Grammatically Correct Princess states that “American news-watchers seem to be attracted to a story's entertainment value rather than its journalistic integrity” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003) while Mayor Quimby mentions that “CNN shows all

kinds of stories; in particular anything violent or negative that is happening in the world. The more astonishing the better” (Lotus Forum, May 21, 2003). While attacking CNN or the American media does not in itself constitute a high level of critical awareness the contributions and discussions made throughout this module did reflect a lot of information processing and opinion formation.

The students used this particular module as a method to both analyze and criticize international news agencies for their coverage of events which will potentially affect them as citizens. I was surprised by the in-depth response that the participants had to this material during the study. However, the positive impressions that surfaced through such post-study activities as the interview helped me see the importance of news media literacy in the secondary classroom. Fluffy concludes this section with an example of the curriculum-prescribed negotiation of meaning, “I enjoyed studying and learning about how news sources aren’t always what they say they are and are just marketed that way so that the reader assumes everything is true but in reality it is just news stories created by the media using words, pictures and phrases to distort the real news story (Interview, July 28, 2003). This statement, made following the study, is interesting because this was not the specific directive for this module. In fact, the instructions simply requested that students investigate the four prescribed web sites and write about how one could interpret the use of language and news coverage. The fact that Fluffy learned about how news sources are not always what they say they are was a result of her own interpretation of the five sites in conjunction with the postings of her fellow classmates.

This shows both the ability to use prior knowledge to formulate opinions and awareness, while clearly displaying the notion of online learning as an effective medium

for sharing and building information. The module regarding online news agencies shows that formalized media literacy training and appropriate probing techniques can encourage students to better frame their critical responses. By allowing students to see the coverage of world events through five different sites they were able to make their own inferences and question whose interests were being served by individual sites. The crown-operated CBC and BBC sites were viewed by the students to be “less biased” and more apt to show different perspectives on the war in Iraq, while the private interests of the American sites were heavily questioned by these students.

Interpreting the Power of Advertising

Students expressed a positive opinion regarding the first module that dealt with online advertising as they expressed a sense of enjoyment based on their request to analyse. Grammatically Correct Princess revealed that she particularly enjoyed “criticizing it [advertisements]” (interview, July 27, 2003). Max Power claimed that, “The quality that contributed to my enjoyment of module one is because I buy most of the brand names we studied” (interview, July 02, 2003). Max Power is showing the pervasiveness of advertising in the everyday lives of people in society. This applicability to authentic material led to comments regarding the practical benefit of having studied this module as indicated by Mayor Quimby: “I believe that this unit has enriched the way I view the Internet and Internet advertising” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 14, 2003). Themes that surfaced from the data collection mainly focused upon the importance of language, audience appeal, technology and celebrities in online advertising.

Viewing Language as a Powerful Tool

In a very detailed response Athena explored the power of the language used by Nike in their "Choose your Destination" campaign. According to Athena, "The Nike company is saying control your destiny. It, by using creative language, associates the concept of choice, freedom and going places with Nike." She further combines the notions of target audience and word choice when she indicates that "by choosing Nike for your footwear you are taking control of your life and you are going exactly where you want to go. After hearing this and seeing it countless times Nike becomes the patriot company and helps the common person enjoy and control happenings in their lives" (Athena, Lotus Forum Posting, May 20, 2003).

Blind Bunga LeCoon explicates the use of language in online advertising when she expresses that, "Media has used and manipulated the English language for their own selfish purpose in selling their products and services" (Lotus Forum Posting, June 01, 2003). Blind Bunga LeCoon justifies this claim later in her posting as she states that, "Nike also uses the gimmick of slogans, calling Nike the 'sole provider,' and playing on the human desire for independence, states, 'Blaze a trail and never look back.'" The interpretation and analysis of the language used within these slogans show an attempt to understand the motives and implications made by major corporations in their efforts to appeal to consumers. This point is further represented by Grammatically Correct Princess who looked at the advertising for MissKiss Makeup Products. She provides the following text in her description: "I am a strong, independent, free thinking person. I don't have to see the world through the same eyes as everybody else. I have my own opinions. I can use my own rain. I sing as loud as I can. I wear what I want. I'm not afraid

of expressing myself. I am me.” She analyzes the use of language in this excerpt by claiming that the quotation appeals to people who like to consider themselves individuals and this particular product appeals to their sense of individuality (Lotus Forum Posting, May 13, 2003). This discussion made by Grammatically Correct Princess reiterates the goals of Blind Bunga LeCoon, who attempts to uncover a link between language use and audience appeal. The words “independence” and “individuality” resurface in both their postings to this module which allows me, as their teacher, to witness a further attempt to understand where they stand in the world of online advertising.

Technological Importance in Advertising

Several students cited the effective use of multimedia technology as important elements in online advertising. References included the fact that certain sites made good use of Flash multimedia, and used appealing graphics (Grammatically Correct Princess, e-mail, May 09, 2003), other companies who had the best navigation for actually learning about their products (Mayor Quimby, e-mail, May 08, 2003), and other sites which possessed “visuals and graphics [that] were interesting and impressive” (Max Power, interview, July 02, 2003). These statements indicate the relevance of multimedia components in today’s world of online advertising. Describing appealing graphics and Flash components as “appealing” and “impressive” often led to further discussion by the students regarding to whom the appeal was intended. In the meantime students were just as quick to indicate faults in the company’s overuse of these same forms of technology and the resulting consumer confusion involved: “When it came to the information and the navigation on the web page, I found it difficult to follow and understand” (Max Power, Lotus Forum Posting, May 08, 2003). While Max Power was one student who

highlighted the positive aspects of using a variety of graphics in online advertising his posting offered the suggestion that visual satisfaction is not positive when it detracts from the overall aim of the site. In this case the objective is to use online advertising to sell their products.

Using Celebrity Power in Online Advertising

The vast majority of the students referred to the significance of celebrities who were included on these sites: “there was actually a line-up of celebrities, including Anna Kournikova, David Beckham and Sergio Garcia” (Mayor Quimby, Lotus Forum Posting, May 12, 2003); “Celebrities such as Zinedin Zidain and are designated a specific area of the site where you can access information on the and view pictures of them clad in Nike apparel” (Blind Bunga LeCoon, Lotus Forum Posting, June 01, 2003); “It featured many celebrity endorsements including Britney Spears, Robert Downey Jr., and Rick Fox.” (Grammatically Correct Princess, Lotus Forum Posting, May 13, 2003). However, Anne of Green Gut downplays the importance of this celebrity factor in online learning when she claims that “I believe that Sketchers shoes have made a user-friendly site with little or no reference to celebrities simply because it's been done, way too often” (e-mail, May 08, 2003). Anne of Green Gut has provided the suggestion that companies using celebrities to advertise their products is not in fact an original idea. I believe that this student has contributed an idea which actually questions the actual intent of companies who use celebrity power as a main promotional tactic.

Another theme involving celebrity influence in online advertising which recurred was celebrities and corporations using charitable organizations on their websites. Frisky Devito mentions the fact that on the Skechers site the only celebrity mentioned was

Magic Johnson (NBA player) sponsoring the YouthAIDS program. Frisky Devito clearly agrees with the inclusion of this endorsement as he states that “being one of the more popular AIDS affected celebrities, Magic Johnson brings attention to the ad, and makes people want to donate their money to a worthy cause” (Frisky Devito, e-mail to Dale Lambe, May 09, 2003). Grammatically Correct Princess also mentions a charitable link on another advertising site when she describes the fact that “I also enjoyed the YouthAids feature whereby you buy a specialized product and a portion of the proceeds are directed towards YouthAids research.” (Grammatically Correct Princess, e-mail to Dale Lambe, May 08, 2003). I asked Grammatically Correct Princess to question the potential profits that corporations tend to gain by including such charitable endorsements. She responded quite promptly with “Its [The corporation’s] association with YouthAid will no doubt aid sales, and I’m sure the marketers at Skechers are aware of this idea. However, I think Skechers is trying to portray the image that they do honestly care about their customers, and through association with YouthAid are trying to make some difference in the world. For this, I must commend them.” (Grammatically Correct Princess, e-mail, May 08, 2003). This rebuttal to my insinuation clearly exemplifies a high level of thought on the part of the student while representing the fact that she clearly fulfills the objective which requires that, “Through the research process of critically questioning ideas, points of view, and cultural perspectives, students can revise their understandings, perceive weaknesses in information, and make better sense of the world” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, p. 81). Grammatically Correct Princess has successfully questioned my ideas and point of view in her attempt to make better sense of the world while providing me with an established opinion based on the material provided.

We may at times encourage our students not to be too cynical and Grammatically Correct Princess has looked beyond the potential profit to be gained by this particular company by stating their support behind a charitable organization. Instead, she has determined that this move is altruistic in nature which is to be commended.

Humourous Celebrity References

The final theme which emerged through the data involving advertising was the ability of students to express humourous points concerning celebrities they were unfamiliar with. I am a student of popular culture and I read their references with great interest. While this does not apply to the English Language Arts curriculum I did enjoy their references. Suejojo states that, “I didn’t notice many celebrities mentioned, except for Yao Ming, and I honestly have no idea who this person is. I’m guessing a basketball player” (e-mail, May 11, 2003). The online format allows Suejojo to feel more comfortable about her inability to identify Yao Ming. By using humour in her writing she manages to maintain coherence in her interpretation which may have been interrupted had she been in a traditional classroom setting. “The only multimedia component included in this site, at least that I stumbled upon, was a flashing image of two black men (I’m assuming models/celebrities), wearing Reebok apparel and sneakers” (Blind Bunga LeCoon, Lotus Forum Posting, June 01, 2003). The use of parentheses in Blind Bunga LeCoon’s Reebok interpretation was another online method of inserting humourous points about the students’ inability to recognize the celebrities who had been chosen to endorse these products. Once again the humour served to maintain the flow of ideas which was always present in Blind Bunga LeCoon’s writing. Grammatically Correct Princess also injected a little more sardonic wit using parentheses when she claims that

“It [Reebok website] featured Terry Tate (some sort of athlete) as a prominent celebrity endorsement on the main page” (Grammatically Correct Princess, e-mail, May 08, 2003). Grammatically Correct Princess’s insertion of the phrase “some sort of athlete” is another indication of her values and opinions which were rampant throughout the study. While the point was conveyed in a humourous manner a deeper analysis may reveal a sense of indifference toward athletics and a negative opinion concerning the Reebok company.

Online Advertising Theoretical Observations

The students in this study made a lot of postings relating to online advertising. The examples chosen by the students, such as makeup products and vehicles, are a reflection of the culture of the students. The postings which drew the highest number of responses from the students were those that targeted and addressed products to which they could relate. Once provided with the appropriate probing techniques and guided questioning, students will critically analyze and reflect upon online advertising and its role in their lives. Through a conglomeration of humourous references, celebrity mix-ups and the exploration of language and text the students were able to achieve a heightened level of critical awareness.

Television and Tourism Analysis

To my disappointment television and tourism did not generate the same amount of analysis and data as I had expected. In the post-study interviews and questionnaires individual students still indicated a preference for these modules. Suejojo noted a link between the media literacy curriculum and assessment when she claimed that, “I got to critique some of my favourite shows, and get graded on it. I thought it was the most enjoyable module” (Suejojo, interview, July 27, 2003).

One particular posting which presented a lot of views regarding television sources of bias is as follows:

The dysfunctional American family is compacted into the personas of Homer, the beer drinking, TV watching, detached father, Marge, the stressed-out, stay at home super mom, Bart, the trouble-making son, Lisa, the smart, over-achieving daughter, and Maggie, the squirmy baby that is easily forgotten about. Many other stereotypes are found in this show, for example, the corrupt nature of society in the police force (lazy, doughnut-chomping Chief Wiggum), the work force (Mr. Burns, Homer's evil demeaning, selfish boss), the school system (Edna Krabappel, the single and irritable schoolteacher), and even television (the violent Itchy and Scratchy show, Krusty the Clown, far from a children's role model. The religious fanatic is also stereotyped in Ned Flanders, the stupid drunk in Barney, and the ladder-climbing suck-up in Smithers. Although this is technically television bias, The Simpsons uses this bias in a comedic approach to score additional ratings" (Blind Bunga LeCoon, Lotus Forum Posting, June 01, 2003).

Through this posting Blind Bunga LeCoon has effectively turned on her media awareness filters and interpreted the producers' intentions in this particular show. She attributes a lot of her ideas to the level of awareness which she received from the module on online advertising when she states that, "Television is designed to appeal to the general public, giving little room or consideration for minority groups. This is bias in itself, although I have come to recognize many more sources of bias from exploring TV promotional sites and completing Module One" (Lotus Forum Posting, June 01, 2003). Blind Bunga LeCoon has applied her previous knowledge and formulated a response which deeply

explores one of North America's popular culture staples. Keeping in mind the fact that she is a secondary student, this posting demonstrates an ability to channel her background information into an analytical essay which has been motivated by the prescribed curriculum. Postings, like the one made here by Blind Bunga LeCoon, show how formalized media literacy training can elicit higher order thinking skills and reflection. The ability to synthesize information is evident through her reference to skills and information gathered from the previous module on advertising, while powers of deductive reasoning are apparent in her exploration of the ratings element of television programming.

Value-Laden Medium for Learning

The online format appeared to foster and sometimes elicit controversial statements from these students. Through monitoring the students' responses and their interactions with one another it can be concluded that the online forum made them feel more comfortable to contribute their honest opinions and add commentary which may have been deemed as socially unacceptable and too controversial in the traditional classroom atmosphere. Statements were made on the discussion forum relating to world affairs, advertising and the tourism industry of Newfoundland and Labrador by students who were quiet and reserved in my traditional classroom context. As prescribed by the provincial curriculum guides, "Critical literacy equips students with the capacities and understanding which are preconditions for effective citizenship in a pluralistic and democratic society. It can be a tool for addressing issues of social justice and equity, for critiquing society and attempting to effect positive change" (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, p. 79). This section will further explore the discussion

prompted by the news module and the corporate opinions generated by the advertising module.

Choosing Sides: Anti-American Sentiment during Stressful Times

The data which resulted from postings collected during the news module elicited a large number of references to opinions relating to the Iraqi conflict of 2003 and the subsequent media coverage of this event. Shortly after the presumed downfall of Iraqi leader, Sadaam Hussein, Suejojo claims that, “Sure, the guy isn't exactly great, but he doesn't deserve everything that's being thrown at him. He's just doing the same thing Bush is doing. Trying to run his country.” (Lotus Forum Posting, May, 2003). While Suejojo is basing this opinion on the news coverage of the five sites investigated throughout the module she offers a personal insight regarding both George Bush and Sadaam Hussein which would be deemed as controversial in the everyday classroom. It is interesting to note hear that Suejojo is a very soft-spoken and quiet individual in the context of my traditional classroom. Lassie's response to this viewpoint was, “No doubt about it, Sadaam needed to be removed from power, but whether or not a war was needed is something that is on many people's minds, but apparently, not the minds of the Americans” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 2003). Lassie offers a rebuttal to Suejojo's support of Sadaam Hussein, but she still provides Anti-American sentiment which questioned the political motives of the Americans during this time. While Lassie is a little more outspoken than Suejojo it was interesting to see her offer arguments against the opinions of her fellow classmate. Her posting is insightful but reiterates the issue of blame which was discussed in a previous section. Blind Bunga LeCoon stated that, “The United States has an unfortunate history of extreme self-arrogance, and they have

continued the attempt to impart their one-sided opinions on the rest of humanity” (Lotus Forum Posting, June, 2003). The Anti-American feelings that were being posted by these students may have been the reflection of our own country’s reluctance and refusal to participate in the war, as well as their observations of the news coverage from different regions of the world. Blind Bunga LeCoon’s commentary is somewhat presumptuous. However it is to be noted that she also has extensive study completed in world history which would further contribute to her opinion. The directive offered to Language Arts teachers that, “Through the research process of critically questioning ideas, points of view, and cultural perspectives, students can revise their understandings, perceive weaknesses in information, and make better sense of the world” (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, p. 81). While critiquing the actions of a nation does not constitute “better sense of the world”, these comments were inspired through a thorough questioning of ideals, points of views and cultural perspectives. The objective blatantly requested that the students perceive weaknesses in information. However, the ensuing opinions of these students were the result of a vast array of other sources of information which permeate their lives along with their exploration of the five news sites that were studied.

Besides the American government this class also takes aim (no arms based warfare of course) at the American media and their coverage of the conflict. In analyzing the CNN web site, Mayor Quimby states that “to find the international content, you first have to find the puny ‘Global News Centre’ heading before you can go read something that doesn’t drip with American patriotism. (Lotus Forum Posting, May 12, 2003). Grammatically Correct Princess questions the accuracy of the American’s coverage of

the war when she makes the firm accusation that “I am convinced that terrible atrocities were committed by the Americans, but that important political figures, including President George W. Bush have censored the media in what facts they are able to print” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 13, 2003). After deliberating these viewpoints Grammatically Correct Princess concludes by claiming, “Based on these findings, one can conclude that the American sites all partake in a sort of “patriotic propaganda” whereby they try to convince the American citizens of the superiority of the United States (Lotus Forum Posting, May 13, 2003). Canadian media outlets should not feel entirely safe from this class. Frisky Devito indicates that there may actually be a manipulation of the news reported in our own country when he states that in reference to a Canadian news agency, “Their major story when I logged on, the announcement of China to possibly execute or imprison anyone who deliberately spread SARS, is a story that relates to the Canadian International policy of human rights. We don't have the death penalty, so we'll mention it anytime someone else does” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 26, 2003).

The extremity and the amount of conviction in these postings represent the voices of young people who are trying to figure out who controls the information we receive. In an age where information is readily available to our youth they want to establish whose interests may be served through the network that we are accustomed to. We live in an age where we encourage critical thinking. As educators we run the risk of creating cynical awareness as opposed to critical awareness. At times I felt that the opinions generated and produced by these students were at risk of reaching a level of cynicism. In the meantime, I could also empathize with them as I had several of these feelings during the last Gulf War Conflict while I was a teenage high school student. As a more educated

and mature individual I felt like intervening and presenting the point of view of the Americans, but I declined as I saw the discussion forum as an avenue for discussion and relating. In a post-9/11 era adolescents tend to attempt to point fingers for unnecessary deaths. The level of awareness and desire to post their thoughts on a war which could potentially affect them in several ways was welcome in this study. It provided an outlet for despair while helping them see that other people in the class were feeling the same way. As stated in guidelines in the new curriculum,

Students' viewing experiences should help them to develop a repertoire of strategies that will enable them to negotiate meaning from an ever-growing array of mass media...Critical response helps students see themselves as free to agree with the text, or to actively disagree with it. Thinking critically about text will help students to recognize and evaluate human experience as well as the text in which those experiences are represented (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997, p. 41-42).

Through viewing different perspectives on war the students felt the liberty to negotiate meaning and arrive at their own conclusions regarding their agreement or disagreement with the information. Views expressed by such students as Mayor Quimby and Frisky Devito relating to "American patriotism" and "spoonfed" news show an evaluation of human experience and attempt to seek more accuracy in how events are recorded.

The Anti-American sentiment displayed by the students show the online discussion forum as an effective means of expression and exploration of ideas. As mentioned in the interpretation of the news agency module, the formalized training in media literacy allows students to become better informed and provides them with a

tighter framework to justify and contemplate their opinions and values. Students such as Grammatically Correct Princess, who made detailed reference to the prescribed sites, used the provided information to draw inferences and come to solid conclusions about her feelings on the war on Iraq. The amount of angst and “talking” that was elicited regarding the threat of global warfare and where to lay blame for this shows a generation who feel comfortable dealing with issues in the security that they found within the confines of the discussion forum. Technology therefore, in this case, allowed more students to contribute their feelings and sentiments about weighty issues.

Values Concerning Other Media Sources

Other values emerged concerning other forms of media throughout the study. When prompted for an opinion on the fashion industry Suejojo indicated that “I feel that the fashion industry treats all its consumers on a equally discriminatory basis” (e-mail, May 10, 2003). Suejojo’s commentary is the result of her interpretation of some cosmetics company’s web sites. Overall she felt that the fashion industry discriminated against all people based on their physical appearance. Blind Bunga LeCoon investigated the issue of bias in television and states that on the show *Friends*, “Unfortunately, the producers are obviously afraid that the introduction of minority groups will cause ratings to drop, and the cash in their pockets to be a little less” (Lotus Forum Posting, June 01, 2003). While Blind Bunga LeCoon is clearly expressing a personal viewpoint she has exhibited a desire to see why and how we receive the forms of media that become most popular. The show *Friends* has been criticized for its lack of racial diversity but it still remains one of North America’s most popular sitcoms. Blind Bunga LeCoon has attributed this fact to satisfying the Caucasian aged 16-30 year old demographic who

represent *Friends* target audience. Advertising was also targeted as Grammatically Correct Princess claimed that “Overall, the site [Nike website] was hard to navigate and full of worthless advertisements for Nike products” (E-mail, May 08, 2003).

Grammatically Correct Princess is once again allowing her personal values to come through in her responses as she clearly does not have a lot of interest in athletic apparel or corporate sponsors. The language used by all three students are harsh and accusatory with words like “discriminatory”, “worthless” and the implication that racism dictates the groups represented on a highly successful television program. These postings indicate that the material provided in an online format can clearly evoke a lot of in-depth and personal reflection which is advocated by the current media literacy movement in education. While the opinions possessed by these particular students may be controversial the level of justification and thought that was presented throughout the modules was a measure of media literate success.

Interpreting Student Media Productions

While the content of the postings justify a heightened level of awareness, it was the student production of a web site advertising a parody of the extremely popular Lord of the Rings series which best displayed knowledge attained throughout the unit of study. The group constructed a web site, complete with Flash technology, which advertised their spoof cleverly entitled Lord of the Fils. The students gave a synopsis of their re-written production, which was an attack on Newfoundland and Labrador politics. The students, Mayor Quimby, Grammatically Correct Princess and Lassie, showed the ability to synthesize information learned throughout the Literary Heritage 3202 course by creating this multimedia production which contained the comedic elements of parody and satire,

while effectively including the traits of online advertising media that were developed throughout this particular unit of study.

Concluding Media Literacy

An analysis of statements made by students throughout the modules of work displays a high level of critical awareness. Their study on different forms of media which they experience in everyday life allowed them to formally gather their thoughts and formulate substantial opinions on important issues such as their exposure to news reports and the expectations of advertisers and corporations. While formal interpretation and criticism may contradict an individual's notion of critical awareness these postings indicate a quest made by the students to question their place in this world and to analyse the institutions and the various forms of media which pervade their everyday lives.

Online Learning Viewpoints

Throughout the study a substantial number of views relating to online learning surfaced throughout the data analysis stage. These themes included equity in online learning, online community building, the role of the instructor and feedback, technical benefits, the future for online learning, student reflections of their own progress and practical advice. While these issues may have been discussed in the past by previous researchers what is unique in this case is that these observations are derived from the statements of secondary students.

Playing on a Level Field

One theme which was made clear throughout the post study data collection was the overwhelming consensus that these students believed that online learning places everyone on the same level in the classroom. While the overall term of equity is

impossible to ensure due to obvious differences in intelligence and socioeconomic status, the students formulated a notion of equitable learning and output opportunities presented by the online format. Using this term does not eliminate or alter differences in the aforementioned factors. However, the students' responses do indicate a high degree of comfort in the online format. Therefore, the students' perception of equitability actually implies an environment which maximizes their personal ability to perform. Suejojo best summed up how she overcame her inhibition of posting responses online when she described that, "Like you're always wanting to put up your work but you're afraid you're going to be below them [the other students] but they're kind of in the same position as you are" (interview, July, 2003). She elaborated upon her description by claiming that "Even people who don't speak up in class. Well, I was one of those (laugh), have to do that and well, it is kind of equalizing." While this idea is presented by a self-professed quiet person, the outspoken Grammatically Correct Princess explains the notion of equity for everyone learning online when she explains that, "I think that some people probably feel more comfortable expressing their opinions online than they would in the classroom because it's more anonymous and people really don't know who you are. I found that a lot of people who were kind of quiet in class posted to the online forum" (interview, July, 2003). Athena also attempts to describe this phenomena by stating that "It helped me see that it is a very effective and open communicative method that carries out the task of teaching and also provides a medium for discussion whereas sometimes in a regular classroom environment some are too shy to speak their thoughts" (interview, July, 2003).

As exemplified above the theme of "those who did not speak before" was a recurring one. Athena compares online learning to placing everyone on an "even plane."

She affirms that “People elaborate on their opinions and they get to hear it, the people who never spoke before” (interview, July, 2003). Blind Bunga LeCoon also acknowledged the fact that it “Gave people who don't normally talk the chance to speak” (interview, July, 2003). The majority of the post-study interviews and questionnaires revealed that there are students who remain quiet in the traditional classroom due to intimidation or inferiority reasons. This recognition is being made by the students themselves. The online format provides these students with an opportunity to fully develop their arguments and produce a complete and articulate case in their favour.

This extended sense of contribution is mentioned by Fluffy who advocates class discussions: “I find class discussions very valuable, because they not only help the individual student but all the majority of others who participate in that particular study and the other students in class because a class discussion gets every student involved in the study” (interview, July 28, 2003). The idea of equitable learning for all learners is a very difficult goal to attain. Through this study discussion forums were viewed by secondary students to be a successful medium for encouraging collaborative learning in an online environment.

The Creation of Community

Throughout the study a sense of community and camaraderie became apparent to me. Like most standard communities events were highlighted by both agreement and dispute. The theme of the importance of class discussions and the resulting sense of community was evident throughout several of the questionnaires and interviews.

Discussion as Community Building

Class discussions were identified by all of the participants as extremely important to the creation of classroom atmosphere and group learning. The soft-spoken Max Power stated that, "Class discussions are valuable to me because hearing other people's opinions allow you discovery and improve your own opinions" (interview, July 02, 2003). The more outspoken Blind Bunga LeCoon echoes Max Power's belief by indicating that discussion "helps me give my opinion. [I] hear other opinions and formulate my own opinion" (interview, July 30, 2003). Athena elaborated upon the opinions of her fellow classmates by explaining that "you get to see everyone's opinions on work, on literature, on how it relates to mankind and the world in general, the nature of anything. Not only that you get to know people through the way they think" (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Athena's view shows how viewing people's common beliefs can contribute in forming an effective learning community. Frisky Devito attributes class discussion to his own learning when he claims that, "You get ideas from other people's thoughts and stuff. You know. If you hear other people's ideas it broadens your own ideas" (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Once again the students have created an ideal of a community of learners who share with one another's learning through open minds. He further explains that, "there's a lot of discussions brought up by students which make you aware of what's going on." Fluffy also endorses the practice of classroom discussions when she explains that, "I find class discussions very valuable, because they not only help the individual student but all the majority of others who participate in that particular study" (personal interview, July 28, 2003). Responses like these emphasize the importance of discussion as a medium for learning and teaching collaboration. Discussion is also a

major determinant in creating effective communities. Mayor Quimby perceived a lack of collaboration during this particular unit when he illustrates the following point: “The Internet is what it is because of all of the people who contribute to it. I always thought before that Internet learning could be effective, but I was never really able to experience it” (questionnaire, June 12, 2003).

Social Observations

The transition from my traditional Literary Heritage classroom context was easy for most people in the class. Grammatically Correct Princess claimed that, “I didn't find it bad at all. It's the same to me. It's just the same as speaking so I didn't mind” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Fluffy felt that the online discussion forum was “even humorous at some times” (personal interview, July 30, 2003). As a teacher I felt that this group became more tight-knit through their online experience. Humorous points often encouraged students to interact with one another who would not do so in the traditional setting. Students who normally did not interact also fought against one another.

Most students considered class discussions to be an important factor in community development within any learning environment. With reference to experiences gained from this course Grammatically Correct Princess notes that:

It's more than just learning about what you're supposed to be studying. We learn more about the people in your class, 'cause I found in the end when we were finishing we were such a close group, we could go out and have a party (smile) just a group of us. So I found class discussions really helped with that. You know you find out what people like and don't like. Things like that (personal interview, July 27, 2003).

Frisky Devito also supports this notion as he claims that discussions “just give you a really good idea of what the people in the class are like. That's probably my favourite part you know. You just get to know people and see their ideas and it gives you something to think about. What they say gives you something to think about” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Through witnessing more opinions and viewpoints in an online format that sense of community became more widespread for the students. There were certainly more things to “think about” as the posted responses offered a sense of permanence and tangible proof of the classmate’s personality.

Community Greetings and Salutations

The online environment helped create a very relaxed atmosphere which accommodated a stronger sense of community. Students worked during class time at their own pace and each student made at least one formal and one informal comment per class. The use of informal language and commentary found its way into several of the postings. Most students used parentheses to implement their own humorous viewpoints. Blind Bunga LeCoon indicated the bland nature of one particular site by placing a (yawn...) in the middle of her response. This would be the equivalence to a smart remark in the traditional classroom. Knowing the particular student it could also be a comment about how we do not know whether she is actually yawning or not as we are now in a virtual learning community. Lassie felt the need to explain a technical glitch with her first posting but managed to insert a little humour using parantheses when she says, “So if you see these words, remember, you're not the insane one (well, maybe you are, but that's besides the point), the computer is!” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 22, 2003). Comments like these were interspersed at the beginning and end of most formal postings. Other

students used quotation marks to indicate sarcasm. Frisky Devito mentioned that he was "studying" for Math while Grammatically Correct Princess manages to take another job at American media outlets by referring to the effectiveness of "embedded journalists." (Lotus Forum Posting, May 13, 2003). Once again the quotation marks lend themselves to interpretation while revealing another element of the person's character which may have been stifled by intimidation in the traditional classroom context.

Postings often concluded with simple informal snippets like "Latah!", "See you tomorrow", "Enjoy!", "That's all for now" and "Have fun." Each of these greetings and salutations helped the students feel relaxed in the online format allowing the students to develop a stronger sense of community. There were also times when postings would commence with in-depth informal lead-ins which would slip into academic mode by the next paragraph. This is best shown by Athena who started her tourism by posting an expression of technical frustration: "Hey, this beastly thing is driving me insane!!! I HATE this computer with an immense passion!! But moving on..." (Lotus Posting, May 20, 2003). While the ideas in her posting were not diminished in anyway this lead-in showed another side of Athena that was light-hearted and refreshing. All of these factors contributed to the formulation of a community.

Another interesting observation regarding the use of smart remarks and informal salutations throughout the study is the fact that these student comments are often considered inappropriate in the traditional classroom. If a student appears to be too witty in the traditional classroom it usually warrants some form of punishment. However, in the online format these comments were viewed as funny and did not elicit any negative feelings at all. If I disagreed with a comment in the capacity of a teacher I simply

ignored it. This also prevented the student from receiving a desired reaction. These comments did, however, contribute significantly to the sense of a learning community that was established amongst these students.

The humour and additional commentary also represented a sense of ownership that the students had over the online classroom atmosphere. While the modules of study were teacher-driven, the students worked at their own pace and at their own comfort level. The synchronous nature of the discussion forum gave students more control over their work time and workspace. This academic freedom resulted in a series of remarks and comments which would not be as prevalent in my traditional classroom context.

Hanging Around the Water cooler

In the beginning of the study I made a specific effort to enhance the online community and help students get used to the technology by opening a discussion thread entitled “The Water Cooler.” This would serve as an informal posting board for all students. While it certainly led to some bizarre postings and weird occurrences (such as an intense verbal dispute between two “quiet” students) our water cooler fulfilled its’ original purpose. As is the case with most workplaces unfortunately there were times when there was more action at the water cooler than what there was for the actual work which was required. Suejojo spoke of the significance of this element of the study when she said that, “We should definitely keep some kind of discussion forum open so we can all keep in touch. This unit was cool, and the water cooler was the best, cause we got to keep up our usual in class tangents! Lol [laugh out loud]” (Lotus Forum Posting, June 12, 2003). While most students did look past the academic intention for this discussion thread and viewed it as an important part of the study it was Mayor Quimby who

expressed regret when he claimed that it was, “sad if the most significant discussions held by the class in general on the forum related to choosing a day to celebrate at the end. I do not believe that there was enough overall contribution from the members of the class; the only things discussed in unison were those that had nothing to do with literature” (questionnaire, June 12, 2003). However in reinforcing the importance of community building in learning environments Fluffy signifies that “... twenty years from now it won't be what Frodo or Oedipus did that matters but rather the things that happened during our lit classes” (personal interview, July, 28,2003). As a teacher I tend to subscribe to both points of view. While curriculum is extremely important to my teaching, the genuine learning experiences and social network building is equally important.

The Role of the Teacher and Student Definitions of Feedback

While the English Language Arts Foundation Document clearly states that:

The teacher's role with all students in a response-based classroom is to elicit the fullest responses from students that they are able to give. They should provide positive feedback to even very brief responses if the content reveals genuine effort and thoughtfulness (p. 42).

During the post-study questionnaire and interview the students involved in this study were eager to share past negative experiences of online learning. The theme which surfaced throughout these negative recounts were the issues of feedback and instructor technological competency. These comments are being made by very conscientious students who often request and require consistent feedback in an effort to reach high personal standards.

In describing their past experiences the participants vividly described what had transpired in their past. Athena stated that her experience was “Pretty negative. (laugh). Because when we tried [previous course] well, there was like problems, from the get-go. Like I never had a password until like April or May and what I had done I had to use other people's accounts and we never got any feedback” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Suejojo contributed the same view by claiming that, “I had one course which was really difficult. The teacher was never there. So you couldn't really ask questions. You were left all in the dark. Then you had to figure out things for yourself” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). According to Grammatically Correct Princess, “Previously, it was terrible. I tried to do a course online and it was awful. The teacher didn't contribute enough. There wasn't enough guidance in the course and...So I didn't enjoy it at all” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Blind Bunga LeCoon stated aptly that it was “crappy. No contact with teacher. No one posted on the discussion forum. It was frustrating” (personal interview, July 30, 2003). All of the aforementioned negative experiences with online learning revealed common themes of the importance of feedback and technical assistance to this process.

Feedback was defined in several different fashions throughout the interviews. Suejojo described the concept of feedback informally when she stated that, “It helps to have everyone's opinions out there on the line, because then you know they're just as vulnerable to criticisms as you, and sometimes criticism isn't a bad thing” (questionnaire, June 29, 2003). Feedback was defined by Athena as “comments from the teacher. What we're doing right and what we're doing wrong. Any ideas that benefit others” (personal interview, July 27, 2003).

Feedback is inevitably the responsibility of the teacher according to these students. Through this experience Grammatically Correct Princess stated that, “I found this course to be way better. There was more guidance from the teacher, more feedback and more...people seemed more open to share their thoughts” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Fluffy also stated that a lack of online interaction with her instructor led to her dislike of her previous course (personal interview, July 28, 2003). Suejojo indicated that contact with the teacher helped students get through this new learning experience: “We had more contact with our teacher in this course which helped a lot. In our other course [a previous online literature course] we were left in the dark about a lot of things, and it was hard to figure out myself, having no prior experience with this type of thing” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). The importance of the teacher in the online process is crucial in the opinion of Grammatically Correct Princess and Blind Bunga LeCoon who claim that “The biggest thing would be a teacher who understands and knows how to use the Internet as a tool and how to make sure that they get back and forth to students on a regular basis” (Grammatically Correct Princess, questionnaire, July 25, 2003) and “Before that I said online learning sucked. This time we all responded and posted making it better. I think it’s dependent on the teacher” (Blind Bunga LeCoon, personal interview, July 30, 2003). These observations show online learning environments in the same light as the traditional classroom context. Feedback and constructive criticism are necessary to create a classroom environment which encourages student learning.

The above statement by Blind Bunga LeCoon reveals a further point of importance regarding feedback that related to the input of students in order to initiate the notion of constructive criticism. As she indicated “This time we all responded and posted

making it better.” Blind Bunga LeCoon is clearly indicating the importance of both student and teacher commentary in order to establish a successful online learning environment. Mayor Quimby elaborates upon this point when he points out that “Dedication of students is a must, and if it exists the sky is the limit for the quality of the program available” (questionnaire, June 12, 2003). In discussing his experience in this particular study he says, “I found that the potential for communication was there, but the participating students never really took advantage of the opportunity to discuss topics with themselves” (interview, July 27, 2003). However the role of the instructor as an important factor in serving as a catalyst for this interaction is also mentioned by Mayor Quimby who advises that “there should have been a greater emphasis on the importance of responses” (interview, July 27, 2003). As a student within my classroom Mayor Quimby clearly felt that more emphasis upon the online contributions of the students on my part could have improved the quality of the online use throughout the study. I certainly accept this criticism in concluding that all participants in an online learning format need to make a commitment to offering constant and consistent feedback to teachers and students in order to maximize the overwhelming learning potential.

Technical Benefits to Online Learning

While there were a lot of frustrations induced by technical difficulties as expressed by the students most comments regarding online learning were positive from a technological standpoint. Blind Bunga LeCoon states that the tourism module “wouldn't have been the same in a book. Wouldn't be able to see videos and hear music. Stuff like that. Anything on the Internet makes it seem better” (interview, July 30, 2003). Lassie, who enjoys computer technology, uses the following criteria for judging effective tourism

sites: "I like... - Lots of pictures. - Multimedia like animations, sounds, slideshows, etc. - Lots of colours. - NO FRAMES!!! - Easy navigation. - Tourist-friendly lingo.- Easily-accessed contact information and FAQ. - Effective and creative text, but not too much of it. – " (Lotus Forum Posting, May 29, 2003).

In Module Three students were asked to establish their own set of criteria for online tourism web sites. The criteria for judging web sites presented the positive aspects of learning online as their critical filters tended to be more concerned with technical aspects. Mayor Quimby claimed that "I liked that the tourism-centralized PEI opened with a number of links to screensavers, computer wallpapers and live-cams to showcase the province's beauty" (Lotus Forum Posting, May 26, 2003) while Cinderella Barbie Doll identified the fact that "the use of Flash makes the site more enjoyable (e-mail to Dale Lambe, May 09, 2003). Suejojo even places aesthetics before information on these sites when she states that "the site isn't really as informative as so of the others, but has more multimedia and other effects not present in the others" (Lotus Forum Posting, May 28, 2003). These forms of technology would not be as accessible for the students in a traditional context. As Athena contributes, "It was more positive because you got to see the whole thing. Like on the radio you only get to hear half of it and on TV the same thing. But online it's just more mapping" (personal interview, July 27, 2003). By referring to the concept of "mapping" Athena is speaking of the comprehensive nature of the Internet as it encompasses all forms of media. Her statement reflects the capability of the Internet as a powerful learning resource. The benefits of learning through direct technology was appreciated by the students. According to Fluffy "it not only taught us

new and exciting things but also was very enjoyable and a lot of fun” (personal interview, July 30, 2003).

Planning for the Future

The fact that these high school students have experienced an online learning environment makes their views regarding the future of this element of education more important. The pitfalls and strengths identified by the students within this study can aid in the future development of media literacy units for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Most of these students emphasized a positive future for online learning amongst high school students. Athena believes that “The potential of online learning for future high school students is in my opinion great. It’s formal and still personal and it prepares the student for independent study” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Fluffy elaborates by indicating that, “Online learning is the way of the future. Eventually as computer technology becomes more available and better suited for use in our society computers will take over the classroom” (personal interview, July 28, 2003). Frisky Devito states that this experience simply solidified views that he already possessed: “I have been using the Internet as a learning resource for quite some time and always saw it as a positive thing. This course just further proved my feelings that I had established” (personal interview, July 27, 2003).

Only one student displayed a bleak outlook for online learning in the future as Max Power stated that “I don’t feel there is much potential for online learning because it is too much freedom for high school students” (personal interview, July 02, 2003). Max Power’s point is very well taken here as issues of motivation are important in implementing online courses. Max Power’s view represents the minority in this study but

his concern regarding unmotivated students is a legitimate one. I believe Max Power speaks from his own experience within this concern as he views online learning as more unstructured learning environment and more demanding of self-discipline. If we are to implement more online learning we will need to heed the opinion of this student and proceed with caution. While advocating online learning, Mayor Quimby reiterated Max Power's point by stating that, "It would be necessary to have the cooperation of the participating students in providing discussions and opinions to the forum, especially in the case of a literature course where subjective views mean a lot" (questionnaire, June 12, 2003). The importance of contributions by all participants in this process is once again being emphasized by Mayor Quimby.

Further themes of apprehension were conveyed by Suejojo, Anne of Green Gut and Mayor Quimby. Suejojo indicated that she "thinks online learning is a promising way of learning in the future, however, it takes away from the classroom experience which I really enjoy" (questionnaire, June 29, 2003). Suejojo is simply warning that we not entirely abolish the role of the traditional classroom in society. Throughout the study this student would mention things that she missed from the traditional Literary Heritage classroom environment. This is interesting considering the fact that Suejojo emerged as a well spoken and thorough online student. Anne of Green Gut stated that "I think this mode of learning will become a much bigger part of high school in the years to come, but classroom (person to person) discussions should never be replaced completely" (personal interview, July 27, 2003). This is yet another comment made with the fear that traditional schooling will be eliminated and we will adopt an online format for the majority of our courses.

Mayor Quimby describes how other courses may be different in their online approach when he explains that, "Before this unit of study, most of my experiences of online learning were objective. We would be told to research one topic or find information on another, without ever really thinking about the sites themselves or how a message is presented. This strongly contrasts the subjective approach taken with this unit" (questionnaire, June 12, 2003). Mayor Quimby concludes his questionnaire with the following vision for online learning: "I now believe that there is a lot of potential for this method of learning; there is plenty of material and subjective minds out there to create an online course" (June 12, 2003). The key word to Mayor Quimby's posting is "potential". Students recognize the potential of online learning and even view it as a legitimate threat to traditional teaching and learning. Should we move forward with the online phenomenon we should beware that we do not lose sight of the importance of human interaction in the development of young minds.

Technological Problems to Avoid

Throughout the postings on the discussion forum and the post-study data collection the recurrent theme of technical problems and their prevention of reaching the maximal potential for online learning was dominant. One attributable factor was the school's network. The computer network itself is functional and able to run most standard HTML web sites. However, with new sites using Flash technology the minimum requirements on each machine were severely taxed. If the student were to reap the full reward of the multimedia experience they often took it upon themselves to view the site from their home computers. Surprisingly all students indicated that they had Internet-ready computers in their homes. The fact that these students maintained focus

and worked during class time is indicative of the system and conformity of traditional classroom contexts. These students had experienced the former classroom context for the majority of the school year and regular routines and expectations had been firmly established by the time the media literacy unit commenced. The observed classroom work ethic is justification for a need for brief face-to-face interaction with secondary students prior to the start of an entire online course.

The students often took the liberty of expressing their frustrations within the text of their responses. For example, Cinderella Barbie Doll states that, “the only problem is you may have to download some media program to view some of the site” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 21, 2003). Frisky Devito also indicated his inability to access certain sites when he states that “There are various multimedia components included in the site, such as moving pictures of sport stars, and Flash displays. However, it is necessary to have certain plug-ins view these components, and unable to access them in school, I was forced to resort to surfing the site at home” (Lotus Forum Posting, June 09, 2003). Grammatically Correct Princess also cites this as a problem on behalf of the web site developers when she indicates that, “The main problem I have with this site is that there are too many frames. The frames make navigation convenient, but they make viewing the page all that more difficult” (Lotus Forum Posting, June 02, 2003). Frames refer to an organizational scheme and programming code used to compose web sites. The technical knowledge of frames exhibited by Grammatically Correct Princess was impressive and I found out a lot of students had learned their computer skills through trial and error and not through Newfoundland and Labrador’s education system.

Other students took a more light-hearted approach to reporting their technical problems. Mayor Quimby contributed his own collection of technical tidbits of sarcasm when he makes such statements as, “It was so complex that my poor little processor couldn't handle it. Supposedly there was supplementary music, but my computer had no speakers”; “I hope they sell a lot of those Vince Carter sneakers; they'll need it to make up for the overuse of graphics that my computer couldn't even view”; and “My computer could only take about two windows, so it slowed down even more fairly quickly” (Lotus Forum Posting, May 12, 2003). I thoroughly enjoyed these sarcastic remarks as the technical problems became an accepted and somewhat funny element of the study, as opposed to the antithetical curricular (and in my case academic) nightmare of students being deterred from computer use.

Technical suggestions dominated the questionnaire and the interview as several technological innovations were mentioned in light of our experience. Throughout the media literacy unit we used a program made available to us through our school district entitled Lotus Forum. This forum was setup and managed through district Information Technology personnel. The site itself included a set of categories and the applicable postings under each category heading. As you clicked on the title you could read the students' response. A reply button was available if you wished to response to a particular students' comments. The program itself fulfilled the curricular and academic intention. However, that is not to say that there were a few technical glitches. Frisky Devito illustrated this fact when he described that, “the actual message board was needlessly complex for something with so few features. A copy/paste feature would have been greatly appreciated, as well as a way to view text documents without downloading the

file would have been nice. Also all replies to a message should be shown on the same page as the original post” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). As a resolution to this problem Frisky Devito suggests that “A message board similar to those at www.ezboard.com would have been much more enjoyable and beneficial” (questionnaire, July 25, 2003). Students with their technical savvy have been exposed to several commercial chat rooms and message boards. As a result educational authorities should ensure that their commercial providers can offer a product which is comparable or more effective than that of the popular competition.

Other students suggested technological features with more synchronous potential. Grammatically Correct Princess suggested that “I think a chat room feature would have been effective, as well as an introduction to different modes of technology” (questionnaire, July 25, 2003) while Athena endorsed the use of “discussion forum along with an instant messenger type chatroom for more discussions similar to that in a regular classroom environment” (questionnaire, July 25, 2003). The issue of asynchronous versus synchronous communication within online courses is worthy of further exploration in educational study. From the point of view of a language arts teacher, I prefer the message board option as it allows students time to process and produce the required information. However, as time and technology advances teaching styles may have to adapt to methods of communication which are equivalent to face-to-face interaction.

In providing a practical implication from his technical problems Mayor Quimby indicates that, “Some of the processors I had to work with were incapable of displaying the high-tech graphics of some of the websites. The computer that one has to work with always limits one's experience in online learning” (personal interview, July 27, 2003).

This statement could certainly hold true for teachers who will be designing courses for purposes of online learning. While Flash technology is fun and cutting edge the majority of computers within Newfoundland and Labrador secondary school settings are unable to handle these requirements. Unfortunately, in this province simpler technology which manages to complement the subject matter should take precedence over the aesthetics of “bells and whistles” which could affect students’ progress with online learning.

Practical Advice from Students

Aside from their views associated with the future of online learning for high school students in this province there were also themes relating to practical advice offered by these students. They all endorse a careful approach to online integration. Suejojo states that, “As long as students are properly introduced to online learning with a teacher still in the classroom at first, I think it’s a promising new way for high school students to learn” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Suejojo’s suggestion indicates that she would like to experience face-to-face instruction prior to engaging directly in online learning. This suggestion is insightful but would defeat the purpose of the principle users of online learning within this province. The main use of online learning in Newfoundland and Labrador is for distance education as CDLI aims to offer comparable course offerings in remote communities throughout the island. Grammatically Correct Princess’s advice also deals with the instruction of the course when she says, “I think that if online learning is presented in a responsible manner with a qualified and competent instructor it can be a very valuable way to introduce curriculum concepts” (personal interview, July 27, 2003). She further describes the ideal instructor in the following fashion: “The biggest thing would be a teacher who understands and knows how to use

the Internet as a tool and how to make sure that they get back and forth to students on a regular basis" (questionnaire, July 25, 2003). Grammatically Correct Princess has provided a checklist of skills necessary for effective online instructors. She has included the necessity of a teacher who is technically competent while possessing the online knowledge to know how to motivate students positively. From a students' perspective she does qualify that "Online learning needs to be treated the same as a conventional "pen and paper" course in order to be effective" (interview, July 27, 2003).

Grammatically Correct Princess qualifies her advice for teachers by offering some practical guidance for students. She realizes that the onus for success in secondary online learning also needs to be placed upon the students for whom this will directly affect. Her statement indicates that secondary students still need to be motivated and work hard even if the immediate presence of a teacher is not there.

The issue of work ethic and motivation were openly admitted to by Max Power and Blind Bunga LeCoon. I will offer my own position on these issues in my section entitled "Research in Action". Max Power claimed that "I would approach online learning with a more serious work ethic" (personal interview, July 02, 2003) and Blind Bunga LeCoon indicated that, "I would do more work in class and not at home (personal interview, July 30, 2003). While both students did in fact complete all assigned tasks they recognized the potential to learn more throughout the unit with a more effort. The importance of motivation is also alluded to by Frisky Devito when he claimed that "Its motivation that is important when it comes to any learning 'cause if people don't want to do the work then they're not going to put much effort into it and they can just use the whole computer side of this now to their advantage. Like 'oh my computer doesn't work

or I don't have this at home so it's just their attitude (personal interview, July 27, 2003). Grammatically Correct Princess also provided advice on this issue as she indicates that, "I think online learning gives people the chance to be more lazy. If it's just online they say 'I'll type it up tomorrow or during class or something.' But if you're not motivated you don't get the work done than that's that, that's it" (personal interview, July 27, 2003). These issues are extremely relevant to this project which explores the importance of online learning within secondary classrooms. The students themselves have provided an inevitable outcome for a large number of secondary students. While research indicates that motivation is a key component in learning it has not yet been studied how monumental motivation could be for online learning.

Other practical insights for online learners were obvious throughout the data. Suejojo addresses the issue of the pace of learning in an online environment when she says, "I'd probably pace myself better instead of taking it easy first and rushing towards the end" (questionnaire, June 29, 2003). This displays how online learning for secondary students can actually encourage reflection upon simple study skills which will benefit them in their post-secondary pursuits. She further adds that, "I think my writing could have been a lot better if each topic had been properly researched. More especially, those on the war with Iraq. I think maybe I should have also planned my answers out on paper before sending them, and that would have made them better as well. Interestingly enough though Suejojo actually felt that she had attained better writing skills as a result of her online postings: "The course content alone also helps to pinpoint faults in the media, and possibly faults in our writing as well. It has made me a more confident writer" (questionnaire, June 29, 2003). Should the reflections made by Suejojo be reciprocated

in a number of self-motivated students online learning will have successfully elicited self-reflection amongst students which will allow them to improve in their future studies.

The insightful and opinionated Mayor Quimby takes his role as an online learner seriously by stating that “I certainly would have tried to encourage other people to participate in the discussions. The forum is a strong tool, but it is only as good as those that use it, and if more people use it more things are said and the discussions are enriched that much more” (questionnaire, June 12, 2003). Much like Mayor Quimby students can view themselves as leaders within the online format who are empowered to encourage and motivate fellow students to contribute.

The themes reported in this section of the report indicate a level of reflection on behalf of these students as they offer learnings from their online experience to future students.

Online Learning Conclusions

Throughout their analysis of their own experiences with online learning the students have contributed invaluable insight into approaches for teachers and students in this learning medium. Interesting points for future study including a study of online students’ personalities is also a necessity based on my observations of the students throughout this study.

Research in Action

Teaching in the Online Setting

As the teacher and researcher within this project I constantly found myself changing my teaching styles and strategies. As a traditional classroom teacher, I tend to dominate classroom discussion and I often express my own views regarding the issues

which arise through the curriculum material. I allow for plenty of class discussion and I attempt to create a relaxing and comforting environment where students can feel free to take risks and have fun learning. While maintaining my class discussion and atmospheric stance in the transition to the online format the part that I found the most difficult was withholding my personal opinions. I wanted them to construct meaning together rather than rely upon me as their teacher and expert. I wanted them to experience the development of their own opinions and knowledge, as opposed to having them replicate my point of view. My previous language arts teaching with this particular class did include substantial teacher input to the learning environment. I knew that experience would dictate that my writing style would be more developed than that of these students. I also knew that, in the role of a teacher, my opinions would influence these students. Therefore I did not post any detailed postings. I simply used the forum as a way to give encouragement and provide more thought-provoking questions. The role of the instructor in an online course has been studied. However, I believe more qualitative research would be beneficial to the field of online learning.

Overcoming Technical Inhibitions

Some students displayed a high level of technical anxiety. While e-mail was a common comfort zone for many of the students the discussion forum created a lot of initial apprehension. As a teacher I initiated the Water Cooler Category for everyday conversation. I opened the informal category and included one controversial line about the television program *American Idol*. Eventually all the students jumped online and the technical element of the postings became a much easier task.

Students who did not feel comfortable posting their responses online offered a lot of apprehension at the beginning of the study. While it was hard to force students to do something, I found that they eventually posted without hesitation once they saw what other people had to say. This indicates a positive contribution that the strong sense of community which developed amongst this particular group added to the study. The contributions of other classmates were also valued and respected by myself and their fellow classmates. This helped facilitate an eventual level of comfort which contributed significantly to the sense of freedom which encouraged class participation in this activity.

Flaws with the Unit

The unit of study itself was not the epitome of teaching perfection. While student opinions presented an overall favourable perspective to taking a media literacy unit of study via an online format I did take note of a number of flaws with my own personal approach to the online medium. These included a lack of constant contact with all participants in the class, a lack of focus in curriculum design ,an inability to ensure valuable outputs for the students' final projects and specific instances where the online setting was not ideal.

While I did make an effort to maintain regular contact with the students in the class I did find the online format for the course to be a little overwhelming as the lack of temporal structure resulted in a higher number of questions and teacher demands. Most of the time, the responses to the questions were very quick and straightforward. I would have liked to have been able to dedicate more of my time to the course but it was extremely difficult given my normal workload. This presents online learning as a format which requires parameters for asynchronous communication. The questions arising from

the media studies unit were equivalent to those of classes held in the traditional context. The difference could be found in the vast amount of time that lapsed between questions and requests in the online format. By setting parameters or applying synchronous communication for a given timeframe this problem would be alleviated.

While my intent in designing a curricular unit with four different modules was aimed to provide students with a broad perspective of media literacy I found that the later modules of television and tourism sites were overlooked in favour for more in-depth discussion of the online news agencies. Dedicating the students to a more focused unit on news agencies would have been more beneficial as the curriculum could allow itself to unfold more naturally. I would consider more focus in designing my next online unit.

While The Lord of the Fils site was impressive the rest of the students composed lackluster web sites which were not really their best level of work. This element of the online study would have significantly contributed to my learnings as a researcher and as a teacher. The students' lack of interest in completing an effective media site could have been due to the time of the study as the school year was coming to an end.

As the poet Irving Layton stated, "By walking I found where I was going." The online learning environment offers a lot of potential but teacher dedication and willingness to learn from mistakes and errors is a must for effective instructional practices. As a teacher I became more aware of witnessing a lack of effort via an obvious lack of attention in their online products. I would appreciate another opportunity to embrace an online learning environment in order to alleviate the shortcomings regarding feedback, curriculum design and student motivation that I experienced during this unit of study.

My first instance where online learning was not the most favourable atmosphere was when I found that students were not providing enough output. They were not replying to each others' questions enough and the discussion was merely teacher-student. This defeats the purpose of transferring to an online format. In future, I would provide more open-ended questions that could potentially lead to more group discussion. The ability to get the entire class more involved in the online format requires more experience in teaching via this method.

Another factor which needs more exploration in my own personal teaching was a lack of deadlines. This lack of firm deadlines led to confusion and sporadic discussions by the participants. In order for online learning opportunities to be more consistent firm deadlines need to be implemented and adhered to.

Pseudonyms

Following the data collection process I gained the ethical right to collect the student and parental consent forms. It was not until this point that I witnessed the students' chosen pseudonyms. At first I was wary that these names would detract from the academic nature of this thesis. However, after a closer look I believe that it added significantly to the quality of the conclusions. The fact that these students chose names which related strongly to media and popular culture reflects a desire to convey their already significant understanding of media information. Names like Frisky Devito and Mayor Quimby are references to significant names from today's popular culture which may take on several different meanings. Frisky Devito is a name with a comic ring to it and could be a take on Danny Devito who is a well-known comedian. Mayor Quimby makes reference to a popular figure from *The Simpsons* who is known for his seedy and

conniving nature. It is interesting how this student adopted this persona as he is very polite and well-mannered. This could be accepted as a political comment by this particular student who displayed anti-establishment and anti-governmental ideals throughout his postings.

Two of the more interesting names to surface were Blind Bunga LeCoon and Grammatically Correct Princess. While two of these individuals display remarkable creativity, these names could once again indicate a desire to contribute greatly to this project by making the study unique and individual. Grammatically Correct Princess takes great pride in her ability to write with great mechanical precision. The name could have been a personal thought of how this skill would be downplayed or reduced in an online format. Grammatically Correct Princess made detailed postings with near grammatical perfection. In the meantime, she also took part in less formal “online” chat which abandoned any notion of mechanical attention. Her chosen pseudonym could have been reflective of an expected transition to the online forum. While I know personally that Blind Bunga LeCoon is the imaginative creation of this particular student I also realize she does not speak or create without some hidden intent. I believe that the Blind in this name may indicate that this particular student is implying that she in fact already sees some of the ideals that are being portrayed in popular culture and our current media. This fact is also interpreted from the analytical and in-depth responses that she posted on issues such as television and news coverage. She may not be downplaying the importance of media literacy but she may be proud of the fact that she already possesses some skills which will be attained throughout the process of the study.

Names like Athena, Fluffy, Suejojo, Max Power and Cinderella Barbie Doll all possess a strong sense that these students chose their names with the implication that they are already students of popular culture. Max Power could easily be a reference to the achievement of “maximum power.” Cinderella Barbie Doll is a female student who would make a statement regarding how these two female models have become the mental objective for several female adolescents. This pseudonym is indicative of another social commentary by one of the students in the study who possess prior ideals as to the importance of media literacy. This student has presented two well-known female characters from current media and incorporated them into one pseudonym which speaks volumes about the previous knowledge of this particular student with respect to media constructions of identity and social fabrications of image.

One of the most humorous pseudonyms was Anne of Green Gut. This name truly questions the individual’s place in the world. A clear play on the famous Canadian icon of Anne of Green Gables this individual also possesses long locks of red hair. However the depth of this name is what is most reflective of this student. With Anne of Green Gables being such an icon and so representative of Prince Edward Island it is interesting to see the reference to Green Gut. A gut is a Newfoundland term for a river opening. It is clear that Anne of Green Gut is making reference to her community and her cultural heritage. One of Anne of Green Gut’s favourite television personalities is Mary Walsh of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. In the fashion that has made Ms. Walsh a renowned Newfoundland satirist the use of this title is a clear parody of the individual’s culture in conjunction with Canadian literary history.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations for this study will be structured around the questions which formed the basis and inspiration for this project. The project effectively addressed issues of students' perspectives of media literacy study, content which is most equitably delivered online, the ability to form and critique multimedia products, the assessment of media literacy outcomes, tactics for motivating online secondary students and understandings of the potential of online learning in the secondary setting.

Students Views on Different Elements of Media Literacy

The students tended to favour the modules of online media literacy which dealt with news media outlets and advertising. While the post-study analyses reflected an overall enjoyment of all modules of study my own perspective saw more controversy and higher thinking skills exhibiting during the study of these two elements of media literacy. The ongoing current events at the time of the study are attributable to their strong feelings towards the news module. The students attributed the prevalence of advertising media as the main factor in garnering their interest in this module.

Online Learning Creates Perceived Equality

The students in this case study viewed the Internet as an "equitable" teaching and learning medium. Based on a notion of creating an environment which elicits the students' highest potential the online learning format was viewed by the students to be equitable and successful. Participant responses confirmed this as values relating to media literacy and opinions regarding online equity were discussed at length by the majority of the participants. The efficacy of this learning medium can be determined through an

analysis of statements regarding media literacy in relation to learning objectives set forth in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador's Curriculum Guides. The students concluded that the online format allowed them to contribute a lot of uninhibited and risky viewpoints without fear of inequality by perceiving other students to be less important than themselves.

Forming and Critiquing Multimedia

The media lessons aimed at developing a critical, contemplative habit in students as they examine the Internet and other media messages in an online learning environment. Their comments showed that this was accomplished. Students demonstrated the ability to deconstruct media concepts in order to identify target consumers and corporate agendas. The technological ability of these students and the amount of background knowledge they possess were a benefit to this study. While findings from this study are not intended to be generalizable they do represent a new kind of learners who already have a great deal of interest in computer-mediated communication technologies. Such interest is an indication of the potential of online learning in the future of media education.

Students created their own multimedia products using skills and criteria developed throughout the unit of study their productions did not elicit a lot of commentary from fellow classmates. The productions were creative and closely followed the various sites that they had been exposed to throughout their media literacy unit. The students accepted and complimented one another's work and did not indicate that the project was a significant part of their learning in the post-study analysis process. This could be attributed to the fact that the projects were completed just prior to final

examinations and the fact that web site construction has become a widespread hobby amongst several people in this class. While the students promptly posted the addresses to their new web sites, the pressure involved with writing final examinations may have detracted their attention from the products posted by their fellow students. Web page design is also a common interest amongst several of these students which could have downplayed the significance of their final products. The students had already constructed and published other web sites that related to real teenage situations and, therefore, a fictional assignment would not elicit as much response or opinion.

Assessing Students in an Online Forum

Assessment became a difficult issue in a number of respects. Overall, holistic evaluation of the student's ability to present arguments, back them up with evidence, and express them in an articulate way was my primary scoring strategy. A holistic score was provided to the students based on the level of argument and justification provided for their opinions. If justification was present in the form of examples and quotes from various online texts, the student received a high holistic score. Grammar and mechanics became, for me, another issue which requires further reflection and study as students would shift between the language of their online culture to the formality associated with standard literary analysis. I was reluctant to reduce their grade for using discourses commonly associated with Internet communication.

Student responses to the various modules were extremely insightful and detailed. The students related well to the discussion forum format for reflection and eventually used this online tool as a medium for expressing beliefs and opinions about current event with a global influence. As students explored the various forms of media they

collaborated and combined information from previous modules in order to progress to a comfortable stage of media literacy. As technology advances and more interactive media become prominent and accessible in rural Newfoundland and Labrador schools, the potential for online learning will be recognized both as a method of alleviating problems of school population decline in rural areas and within schools as an effective means of teaching classes.

Secondary Online Learning Supports

This study reveals several supports which are required to improve success for more learners in online learning settings. Students offer practical advice for learners and instructors by relating personal experiences which have impacted their views on online learning. They have also reflected closely upon the experience garnered from this study in order to offer invaluable insights into effective online learning and teaching strategies.

As a teacher I would advocate the use of online technology throughout the curriculum. Teachers should proceed with caution and ensure that sufficient training has been undertaken. This is in response to a clear indication from the students' belief that online instruction should be taught by a competent and technologically savvy professional. The students' desire to speak about their previous unsuccessful online learning experience was often directed at incompetent teachers who had not yet mastered the required technology. The students' views show a need for a teacher who can use the available resources to inspire and produce the maximum amount of student discussion.

In future I would attempt to encourage more student debate in an online discussion forum. While teacher-student exchanges tended to be the major source of

learning in this case, I now realize that I need to teach students how to interact in an online environment so as to ensure a higher level of collaborative learning.

As a researcher, I would suggest further study into the perspectives of secondary students concerning online education. Issues which surfaced throughout this study could certainly elicit more research. Particular studies regarding the importance of motivation in secondary online learning would lead to more suggestive practices for teachers and students who are about to partake in online activity.

I would also suggest further media literacy instruction research. While the online format for media literacy instruction has been presented in a positive light through findings in this study, more models of media education should be explored. Further studies regarding media literacy should also examine the amount of learning that can be achieved through the production of media texts in a secondary classroom.

The Future is Sunny with Cloudy Periods

The data from my study indicate that there is a lot of potential for online learning in Newfoundland and Labrador. The students involved in this study believe that there should be careful implementation of such online learning environments. As an action researcher I have gained a unique perspective of online learning in a secondary setting as I have reflected on effective and ineffective strategies for teaching. My own observations have been complemented by the opinions and beliefs of these students, which are equally as important in developing educational theory and practice.

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Appendix A

The Unit of Study

Module One: The Study of Online Advertising

The advent of the Internet has given rise to another avenue for corporate advertising. Businesses strive to "outwit, outsmart, and outplay" the competitors with sites which utilize current technology to attract new customers. Sites are to be viewed with a focus on aesthetics and the overall ability to sell the appeal of the product. Look at this site which explores the Power of Language in Advertising and answer Question #1 in our discussion forum.

Keeping this in mind view four of the following sites and answer the Question #2 in our discussion forum. Use this site to aid you in your site critique.

- Nike
- Adidas
- Skechers
- Reebok

Module Two: An Investigation of Online News Sources

Please view the following site and answer Question #1 on the discussion forum:

How to Detect Bias in the News

Next, I want you to view five of the following links and contribute your daily reflection for Question #2 on the discussion forum:

- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News Coverage
- CNN
- BBC News
- Reuters News Agency
- United Press International

Module Three: Government Agencies on the Web

Check out four of the Atlantic Province's Tourism Web Sites as listed below:

- Newfoundland
- Nova Scotia
- Prince Edward Island
- New Brunswick

Module Four: Network Programming Via the Internet

Television networks' competition has lead them to use the Internet to advertise and extend their programming.

- Friends
- Everybody Loves Raymond
- Eight Simple Rules
- Malcolm in the Middle

For a more comprehensive look at this unit of study please visit:

<http://www3.nf.sympatico.ca/lambe/Media>

Appendix B

Ethics Review Approval

April 21, 2003

ICEHR No. 2002/03-050-ED

Mr. Dale Lambe
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Lambe:

Thank-you for submitting the requested revisions to the proposal for the research project entitled "*A Phenomenological Study of Media Literacy Online Learning Environments*".

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research has examined the proposal along with the revisions and is appreciative of the ongoing efforts made to ensure the protection of research participants. The Committee has given its approval for the conduct of this research in accordance with the proposal and revisions submitted, on the condition that the additional modifications listed below are incorporated:

1. The committee appreciates your efforts to revise and enhance your research ethics protocol, however, a few issues remain. One of these concerns the promise of "strict confidentiality" in your consent form. The consent forms still seem to overstate the level of confidentiality that it is possible to promise, since you can only promise confidentiality within the limits of the law. Please adjust these statements accordingly.
2. The discussions in the consent forms regarding the right to revoke participation at any time ought to be expanded upon, to note that this includes not answering specific questions in the questionnaire or interview (in the youth's consent form), and that if one (or one's child) withdraws, all of his/her previously collected data will be withdrawn from the study.
3. Also, the information about the study ought to address what will happen if the parent consents and the student does not, or vice-versa.
4. For clarity, point "c" on the parental consent form should be revised to eliminate the implication that the parent might

be audio-taped, since this is clearly not part of the plan for this study. The ICEHR contact person for this review should you have any questions is Dr. Wayne Ludlow, Faculty of Education. Dr. Ludlow can be contacted by calling the ICEHR office at 737-8368.

If you should make any other changes either in the planning or during the conduct of the research that may affect ethical relations with human participants, these should be reported to the ICEHR in writing for further review.

This approval is valid for one year from the date on this letter: if the research should carry on for a longer period, it will be necessary for you to present to the Committee annual reports by the anniversaries of this date, describing the progress of the research and any changes that may affect ethical relations with human participants.

Thank you for submitting your proposal. We wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Janice E. Parsons
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee
on
Ethics in Human Research

JEP:jjp

cc: Dr. Wayne Ludlow

Appendix C

Parental Letter of Consent

March 23, 2003

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University and your child's Literary Heritage 3202 teacher at _____. This research is being supervised by Dr. Roberta Hammett. I am requesting permission to have your child participate in a two-month study. I am requesting the permission of both you and your child to take part in this study.

This study will involve a two-month study of a class of 21 high school students who will complete a Language Arts unit on media literacy. The unit will be taught via an online discussion forum and a website which will incorporate various forms of multimedia to be composed and evaluated by the students. The purpose will be to determine whether language arts outcomes for media literacy can be effectively achieved using an e-learning format. A discussion forum will be tested as an effective resource for this component of the media awareness curriculum in Language Arts.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation in this study will not negatively impact your child or his/her learning. If, at any time, it becomes apparent that this is not an effective teaching method, and your child is not learning as expected the online learning environment will be abandoned and regular, face to face instruction will be implemented. In addition, the teacher will be available for face to face interaction with the students throughout the study. This unit of study helps your child attain Essential Graduation Learnings prescribed by the Department of Education. However, in the case where students are not participating their data will not be archived, postings will be eliminated from the data set and students will not be interviewed or audiotaped. Your child may decline to answer any individual questions or stop the interview/activity at any time without prejudice.

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee for Ethics in Human Research. If you have any questions or concerns about the research that are not dealt with by the researchers, you may contact the Chairperson of that Committee through the Committee's secretary, Ms. Eleanor Butler, at the Office of Research, Memorial University. The results of my research will be made available to you upon request. Please note that your child will not benefit financially from this study in any way as it is a part of the regular program of study.

If audio recordings are made during the interview, they will be held in a secure location and destroyed upon completion of the study. In reporting data in any material made public I will grant anonymity to these students by providing a pseudonym to identify

your child. The online discussion forum will be extremely secure with access restricted to those participants in the study.

If you are in agreement with having your child participate in this study, please sign the attached consent forms and return one copy to the classroom teacher. The other is for you. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at... . If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dean Alice Collins, Faculty of Education at (709) 737-2491.

Yours sincerely,

Dale Lambe

Appendix D
Parental Consent Form

I hereby consent to myself / my child (whose name is _____) being audio taped, and observed.

I understand that:

- a. any information gathered (as noted above) will be used only for educational purposes and that this information may be shared with the university supervisor.
- b. that all information gathered is to be kept strictly confidential and to be used only for purposes stated.
- c. any audio recordings made of me or my child will be erased at the conclusion of all research activities and data analysis.
- d. any online discussion forums will reveal names of students but will only be accessible by students and educational authorities who are involved in this process.
- e. anonymity of your child in the final report will be guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms in materials which may be made public following this study.
- f. I have the right to revoke my permission at any time.
- g. Agreement to participate in this project will not impact the students academic mark in any way. Interviews and questionnaires concerning student values and attitudes concerning this study will be conducted after final marks have been entered and distributed to the students. The researcher will be unaware of students who have not agreed to participate

Signature of Consenting Parent/Guardian

Relationship to the Student

Signature of Teacher

Printed Name of Witness

Date

Acknowledgement of receipt by Principal

Appendix E

Student Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT for RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Investigator: Dale Lambe

Research participant: _____

Please Print

This is to certify my willingness to participate in classroom/action research conducted by Mr. Dale Lambe in a course in which I am a student member. I understand that the investigation will examine the instructor's and students' interactions and learning, and may extend to any and all artifacts that I produce as a participant in the course. Any resulting publication(s) will be made available to me upon my request.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty, and that I may refuse to provide research-related artifacts or answer research-related questions at any time. I may take my research-related concerns and questions to Dean Alice Collins, who is not connected with the research in any way. She may be contacted at the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland; by telephone at (709) 737-2491; or by email, alicec@mun.ca.

As a participant in the investigation I understand that all information collected will be strictly confidential with regard to my identity, and that I can choose a pseudonym for publication of the data beyond the classroom activity in which it was produced. An exception to the assurance of confidentiality will be any artifacts I willingly post on the Internet under my own name.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and all such questions and inquiries have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent.

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in the classroom research.

My chosen pseudonym is _____.

Date _____ Participant's Signature _____

I, the undersigned, have defined and explained as fully as possible the potential investigation to the above participant and agree to uphold the promises I have made in this agreement.

Date _____ Teacher's Signature _____

Appendix F
Post-Study Questionnaire

Student Questionnaire
Media Literacy and Online Learning

1. Do you have access to a computer and phone line at home?

A.) Yes
B.) No

2. Was enough in-class time provided for you to complete the tasks during class time?

A.) Yes
B.) No

3. Are you comfortable with email, computers, and new technologies?

A.) Yes
B.) No

4. Do you feel more comfortable about online learning having studied this unit on media literacy? Feel free to make additional comments in this section.

A.) Yes
B.) No

5. How would you categorize your experience with online learning prior to this unit of study?

A.) Negative
B.) Somewhat negative
C.) Somewhat positive
D.) Positive
E.) This was my first experience

6. Has your opinion on online learning been influenced by this course? Feel free to elaborate.

A.) No
B.) Somewhat
C.) Yes

- 7.) Would you categorize yourself as a responsible and conscientious student?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

8.) Are class discussions valuable to you?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

9.) How would you rate the quality of discussions initiated by the unit's discussion forum?

- A.) Ineffective
- B.) Somewhat Effective
- C.) Effective

10.) Are you comfortable communicating in writing?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

11.) Did you feel comfortable contributing your opinions in the online format? Feel free to elaborate.

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

12.) Which of the modules of this unit did you find taught you the most about online learning?

- A.) The Study of Online Advertising
- B.) An Investigation of Online News Sources
- C.) Online Government Agencies
- D.) Network Programming Via the Internet

13.) Do you think you will encounter future experiences with online learning?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

14.) How do you feel about the potential of online learning in the future for high school students?

15.) If provided with the opportunity how would you change the way this section of the course was delivered?

16.) How would you approach online learning differently in the future if you were to pursue another course in electronic mode?

17.) Feel free to add any other commentary that you have which may be beneficial to this study?

Appendix G

Post-Study Semi-Structured Interview

Are class discussions valuable to you?

Did you feel comfortable contributing your opinions in the online format?

How would you rate the quality of discussions initiated by the unit's discussion forum?

How would you categorize your experience with online learning prior to this unit of study?

Has your opinion on online learning been influenced by this course?

Do you feel more comfortable about online learning having studied this unit on media literacy?

How do you feel about the potential of online learning in the future for high school students?

What qualities do you feel contributed to your enjoyment of Module _?

If provided with the opportunity how would you change the way this section of the course was delivered?

How would you approach online learning differently in the future if you were to pursue another course in electronic mode?

A final question asking for elaboration upon final question from the questionnaire.



