

Preface

Virtually all aspects of the practice of education have their roots in effective communication.

Good communicators are open, active listeners. They bring a spirit of goodwill to their interactions with other human beings. They seek out opportunities to deepen understanding by asking good questions. They're curious and open to getting in over their heads in the search for knowledge. They avoid making snap judgments. They activate the mind, heart, and spirit in all their encounters with the people around them, listening and responding with the whole self to the other whole self they're interacting with.

Good communicators are self-aware. They ask questions in search of understanding. They're passionate about something that matters to them. They recognize their own values and needs and use advocacy to accomplish their goals and get things done.

Good communicators live in the present tense. They're awake to what's happening in the here and now. Sensitive to context, they take in each little nuance of the moment and adapt to it, moving with the flow. Good communicators try new things. They improvise. They play well in the sandbox with others. Good communicators are life-long learners. Every good teacher I have ever met has these qualities.

If you've picked up this book, it's because you're interested in helping your students strengthen their critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills, and you think that digital media, mass media, and popular culture may be useful resources and tools to support those goals.

Whether you're a school leader, teacher educator, curriculum specialist, technology teacher, or library/media specialist or teach English, social studies, health, science, business, video production, or the fine and performing arts, you'll find ideas in this book that help you make better use of media texts and technology tools. If you read this book and discuss it with your colleagues, you'll be able to work collaboratively to infuse digital and media literacy into your school's curriculum.

In this book, you'll find stories of teachers in Grades 7–12 who are connecting the classroom to the culture in their middle-school and

high school English, history, chemistry, health, or video production courses. Principals, counselors, technology coaches, and library/media specialists play important roles in this book, too. Armed with a clear understanding of key concepts of digital and media literacy and its deep theoretical roots, these educators use powerful instructional practices to reach all learners.

Our students are swimming in an ever-changing world of media, technology, and popular culture. Social networking, music, movies, celebrities, athletes, and video games are key pleasures for young people around the world. There's just so much entertainment and information competing for our attention at all times of the day and night. And today, the scarce resource is human attention. In an age of information overload, learning to allocate one's attention to high-value messages is perhaps the one skill that will continue to reap benefits across the life span.

Every day of our lives, we create and consume messages using language, graphic design, images, and sound. We participate in social networks where sharing is valued as a form of personal expression and social learning. We manipulate a wide variety of types of symbols in both formal and informal settings, and these skills are now fundamental to the workplace. For the growing number of knowledge-economy jobs—from services including marketing and distribution as well as creative industries such as engineering and architecture—people need to be comfortable in manipulating symbols and using multiple digital platforms for collaboration and sharing.

The inclusion of digital and media literacy in secondary education promotes lifelong learning. Keep reading, and you'll learn about school leaders, technology and library/media specialists, and teachers in science, history, English, health, and other subject areas who have developed creative and effective strategies to bring digital and media literacy to learners. This book addresses these two questions:

- How can educators make use of popular culture, mass media, and digital technologies to help students develop *critical thinking skills*?
- How do students learn to be *responsible and effective communicators* with an appreciation of the human condition in all its complexity?

According to the Common Core Standards, just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the 21st century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of

media) must be integrated into the curriculum across all subjects in secondary education.

In the Common Core Standards, we find the following statement:

To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas; to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems; and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new. The need to conduct research and to produce and consume media is embedded into every aspect of today's curriculum. In like fashion, research and media skills and understandings are embedded throughout the Standards rather than treated in a separate section.

In this book, I show how digital and media literacy offers the potential to reinvigorate both the arts and humanities and the natural and social sciences in Grades 7–12. By helping students and teachers use creative and powerful ideas that bring relevance to the classroom, students explore contemporary culture, media, and technology as they build communication and critical thinking skills. As you explore how mass media, popular culture, and digital media can be used to support academic achievement, you'll get ideas from this book that you can put directly into action.