

by Ellen Ullman

MEDIA MATTERS

Here's how one college professor puts the 'me' in media.

EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

David Considine
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"But what does this have to do with me?"

It's a question that most teachers hear at least once in their careers—if not more often. David Considine, winner of a 2008 Cable's Leaders in Learning Award, has made it his mission to help teachers create the types of lessons that make this question unnecessary.

"Until kids locate themselves in the curriculum, they don't buy into it," he says. "Media is an incredible bridge to connect kids to the material in the class."

Considine—a longtime advocate of media-literacy instruction—has done perhaps more than anyone in the United States to bring it into the schools. He's created a conference on the topic, a graduate program, and a textbook.

IF YOU BUILD IT ...

In September 1995, Considine joined the board of directors of the National Telemedia Council (NTC). Working with NTC and Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., where he is a professor of media studies and instructional technology, Considine put together the first national media-literacy conference. It was held in Boone, and approximately 400 people attended.

"The conference was a successful stepping stone," says Considine. "We had people from 35 states and four countries."

At the time, media literacy was a new area in the U.S., so Considine—who had come to the U.S. from Australia in the early 1970s—imported conference speakers from Canada and the United Kingdom, where it was already an established practice.

The conference, as well as Considine's books and articles, were the impetus for the first U.S. masters degree program in media literacy, which he designed and implemented in 1999. The 36-hour media-literacy graduate program includes production and instructional design because, as Considine says, "You can't just analyze other people's work; you must be able to create your own."

He also created an 18-hour certificate program, and was able to put some of that coursework online. In fact, the gateway



Considine has seen interest in media-literacy education grow steadily since he hosted the first U.S. conference in 1995.

course has been taught online for the last decade, and all of the clips have been digitized.

When he started the masters program, Considine was amazed that it attracted students from around the world, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Cyprus, and Japan. Several graduates have already spread the media-literacy message. A science teacher returned home to Chicago and transformed her approach to teaching science. A Catholic nun developed a media-literacy program for her order in the Philippines.

Considine is pleased that the courses teach students how to anticipate opposition and brainstorm possible strategies to diffuse it. "To send them out excited without giving them the power to face adversity won't help," he says. "We want people to be change agents."

CARRYING ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION

While launching the successful masters program, Considine turned to his next goal: helping teachers work media literacy into their lessons, regardless of subject matter.

"I would go to huge national conferences where there was nothing in the exhibit area in terms of media or media literacy," says Considine. "I had taught this stuff for years to middle and high school students."

As a result, he and his wife, Gail E. Haley, put together the first comprehensive media-literacy textbook, *Visual Messages: Integrating the Imagery into Instruction* (Teacher Ideas Press, 1992). The well-regarded book features a series of activities for elementary, middle, and high school classes.

His second book, which was published in 1994, is about evaluating picture books. Aimed at elementary school teachers, it's called *Imagine That: Developing Creative Thinking and Viewing through Children's Literature*.

"There's more to these books than meets the eye," he says. "We wanted to show teachers how they could develop critical-viewing skills by using something they already worked with—picture books—but instead of working just with words, genres, or literary elements, they could also work with images, design, layout, and so on."



For More Information

For a podcast interview with David Considine or a list of the 2009 winners and finalists, go to www.leadersinlearningawards.org.



Considine encourages his students to be healthy skeptics as they use and analyze media.

WHAT NEXT?

Considine's latest project is putting more graduate courses online and continuing to write articles on media literacy. He's also been preparing for this summer's institute, which will likely be on linking the literacies. (Last year's focus was social studies; next year's will be English language arts and library/media.)

"People come into media literacy from different avenues and perspectives; we try to broaden the perspective," he says. "Many still think media literacy involves condemning the media or helping young people resist media manipulation, but that is not the case."

He believes the real goal for anyone teaching media literacy to young people is to help the students develop healthy skepticism instead of cynicism. It's a skill that must be nurtured with teachers ahead of time. "It's a balancing act, but kids are fascinated when you demystify the mystique, kind of like pulling back the curtain in the *Wizard of Oz*," he says.

"When I started this 10 years ago, I did not know what the buy-in from students would be," Considine says. "But the most exciting thing is opening up the audience. Once you get an incredible dialog going, you have a community of learners."

Ellen Ullman is senior editor of *Cable in the Classroom Magazine*.

Clearing Up Misconceptions

David Considine spends a lot of time debunking media myths. Here are three of his favorite lessons.

1. MEDIA + YOUTH = BRAIN DRAIN OR BRAIN GAIN?

It depends on how it's used, says Considine. Media can be a brain drain or a brain gain. Media empowers us; it is not an impassive model.

2. TOOLS DON'T CHANGE SCHOOLS; TEACHERS DO.

Teachers need differentiated staff development and time to rehearse, reinforce, and reinvent.

3. WE HAVE RICHER READINGS BY LINKING THE LITERACIES.

A multi-genre approach engages young people in ways that are critical. Almost all standards in English language arts say that learners will interpret texts that are read, heard, and viewed. Considine says most teachers lack the strategies to unpack texts that are viewed, so they revert to what they know.

RELATED RESOURCES

Dr. C's Media Literacy
www.media-literacy.net

Imagine That: Developing Creative Thinking and Viewing through Children's Literature

David M. Considine, Gail E. Haley, Lyn Ellen Lacy (Teacher Ideas Press, 1994)

Visual Messages: Integrating Imagery into Instruction

David M. Considine and Gail E. Haley (Teacher Ideas Press, 1992)