

RE-254855-OLS-23 - Ithaca College (Project Look Sharp)
ML3: Librarians as Leaders for Media Literacy in U.S. Schools

Summary: This initiative addresses Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program **Goal #3** Enhance training and professional development... **Objective 3.3:** training programs to build skills and expertise in developing engaging lifelong learning opportunities, cultivating critical thinking skills, and facilitating self-directed learning opportunities.

The current “[Infodemic](#)” of disinformation and the epistemological crisis that threatens our democracy requires our educational systems to support K-12 students in the development of lifelong habits of critical thinking that are essential to enlightened citizenship in our hypermediated digital age. Since 1996, [Project Look Sharp](#) (PLS), a non-profit initiative at [Ithaca College](#), has designed [unique and effective materials](#) and an [instructional approach](#) for integrating media analysis throughout the curriculum. This \$149,894 planning grant will enable PLS, in partnership with the [American Association of School Librarians](#) (AASL) and in collaboration with the [National Association for Media Literacy Education](#) (NAMLE) and the [New York State School Librarian Systems Association](#) (SLSA), to develop a plan to implement this work across the nation, providing librarians with the training, materials and support they need to be leaders of media analysis for their teachers and ultimately for all students in their schools.

Project Justification: For students to develop habits of questioning the source, accuracy and credibility of media messages, they need continual practice in asking [key questions](#) about all media (Sperry & Scheibe, 2022) and to reflect on their own confirmation biases – to be metacognitive (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). The integration of question-based media analysis should begin with our youngest students (Rogow, 2022) and be integrated across the curriculum (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012). Digital and information literacy skills are essential in addressing issues of equity and justice, especially for disenfranchised and marginalized students (De Abreu, 2022).

For 25 years teachers have told PLS, “We don’t have the time – in the day, in the curriculum, in our preparation – to add one more thing!” In response we have given educators resources to integrate the teaching of subject area standards with critical thinking about media messages – a methodology we call [Constructivist Media Decoding](#) (CMD). We currently have over [560 free lessons](#) on our website that use rich media documents - short video clips, social media posts, paintings, songs, excerpts from articles, etc. – for integrating media analysis into the curriculum. For instance: using [cereal packaging to teach about nutrition](#) and advertising in 1st grade, analyzing [clickbait to teach digital literacy](#) skills in middle school, using the introduction to the Disney film [Aladdin to teach about stereotyping](#) in 9th grade global studies, and analyzing conflicting diagrams about [hydrofracking to teach about hydrology](#) and sourcing in high school earth science. In addition to teaching subject area content through analysis of these “texts” teachers ask key questions about authorship, sourcing, credibility, bias and more.

Teachers need the lessons, but they also need training in facilitating student-centered, inquiry-based, objectives-driven media analysis (see a 5 minute [video demonstration](#)). The many school librarians and leaders of school library systems with whom we have worked over the last 2 decades have made it clear, they should be the leaders of this work in their schools. They have a background in digital, information, and media literacy; inquiry; and curriculum mapping. They are connected to all subjects and levels, all teachers, and often all students. Their role as instructional and curricular leaders is often underutilized. And they embrace the mission of advocating for facts, truth and self-reflection.

For the last year PLS has partnered with SLSA on a 2-year grant-funded New York State [ML3 initiative](#), that has developed and piloted: PD training for librarians, [CMD Starter Kits](#) for librarians and teachers, a hybrid self-paced and in-person course co-facilitated by librarians, and PD materials (slide sets, activities, guides) for librarians to deliver workshops in their schools and regions. This work has been very successful in New York with statewide rollout for all school librarians planned for March 2023. However, the school library system structure in New York that has been central to this approach is not replicated in other states. For librarians to become instructional leaders of media analysis nationwide, we need research into the opportunities and challenges for implementation in other states. We need to develop partnerships and collaborations with school library organizations and networks. We need to assess opportunities for integrating CMD into library preservice programs. We need to assess the best approaches for promoting this work to librarians as well as administrators and policy makers in all states, leveraging the current legislative and policy initiatives for teaching digital and media literacy. We need to develop approaches for sustainably supporting ongoing growth of librarians as leaders of this essential civic and education mission.

Project Team: Chris Sperry, the PI on this grant, is PLS’ Director of Curriculum & Staff Development, a curriculum designer, PD provider, and director of the NY State ML3 Initiative. He will work closely with PLS Executive Director, Dr. Cyndy Scheibe and PLS Operations Coordinator Josh Solomon. Sylvia Norton, Executive Director of AASL will be the lead collaborator, bringing to bear the resources, networking and experience of the leading national school library organization. Dr. Faith Rogow, the founding president of NAMLE, will oversee evaluation for the project.

Project Work Plan: We will build on the NY State ML3 initiative to accomplish the following over the next 2 years:

- Convene a new ML3 National Advisory Group that includes the executive directors of AASL, PLS, NAMLE, the Director of the New York City School Library System, and other advisors who can speak to the diverse needs of school librarians, library systems and preservice programs across the nation.
- Research school library systems and preservice programs in all 50 states to identify approaches and challenges for implementation, including: statewide structures, organizations, networks, mandates, legislation, alignment to statewide priorities, or other leverage points.
- Present a workshop and hold focus groups at the Fall 2023 AASL Biennial Conference to assess needs and opportunities, get feedback and advice, network for collaborations, and involve stakeholders in this work.
- Survey school librarians nationwide to assess interest, need, opportunities, and challenges for implementation.
- Network to develop partnerships in diverse states for future implementation.
- Remix short videos to promote ML3 to librarians, administrators, teachers, and policymakers in different states.
- Pilot and evaluate approaches for reaching school librarians nationwide with targeted information about ML3.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current ML3 resources and revise for use in diverse contexts and populations - including the PLS collection of free lessons, the CMD Starter Kits, the hybrid course, and current PD workshops.
- Pilot and evaluate approaches for librarians to network and support each other in this work.
- Develop a written plan for implementing ML3 nationally through work with statewide organizations/structures, pre-service librarian programs, and outreach to school librarians, schools and districts that will give school librarians across the country access to the training, resources, and support to become leaders of media analysis in their schools

Diversity Plan: Effective teaching of diverse student populations is core to CMD. PLS's library of free materials include hundreds of media decoding lessons that integrate diverse perspectives about challenging topics into the core curriculum using "texts" that are particularly effective when working with students who have been disenfranchised by strictly print-based instruction. This inquiry-based approach builds student engagement, agency, and life-long learning as they decode the media that inundates their lives. Our PD protocols train librarians how to teach teachers to listen well to the meaning making of their students, to ask questions and to facilitate civil dialogue, especially about potentially polarizing issues that link to diverse identities. Our PD trains educators to cue into the emotional and cultural orientations of their students and to lead media analysis free from the bias of the teacher – focusing on fact-based evidence and self-reflective interpretations by students of diverse backgrounds and orientations.

We will keep diversity front and center in all of our research, surveys, assessments and outreach – ensuring that the data and insights that will drive the development of our implementation plan reflect the diversity of our nation. This will include recognizing the great diversity of school libraries nationwide, including identifying the needs of rural, suburban and urban communities; school librarians with different levels of experience and expertise with media literacy; resource inequities; and other variables related to the unique contexts of school libraries and librarians nationwide.

Project Results: This grant will prepare PLS and AASL to implement a national plan to give school librarians (including pre-service librarians) the training, advocacy, and resources they need to lead the integration of inquiry-based media analysis in their schools. It will connect the field of media literacy to the expertise, capacity, and mission of school libraries nationwide. It will develop partnerships that will enable national implementation. It will facilitate the collaboration and networking of school librarians nationwide in growing and sustaining their role as media and information specialist. It will promote the role of librarians as instructional leaders to policy makers, administrators, teachers and librarians. Ultimately, this initiative will enable librarians to lead an essential educational and civic mission – to have students develop habits of critical thinking about all media messages and about their own meaning making.

Budget Summary: Our request for \$149,894 includes funds for the following:

- **Salary and Benefits for the Primary Staff** working on this initiative (including overseeing all aspects of the grant, running focus groups of librarians, presentations at AASL conference, and conducting other research, networking, advocacy, and planning for national implementation) all of whom will be working part time on this project (\$70,808);
- **Subcontract to AASL** for staff member to research, identify and network with national partners appropriate for eventual implementation, as well as advising on the overall project (\$20,000);
- **Outside Consultants** including [Dr. Rogow](#) who will handle evaluation of the planning and pilot work, remixing of promotional videos by [Rhys Daunic](#), and some website programming by Cyrus (\$20,000);
- **Travel and Accommodations** for consulting and conferences (\$4,800);
- **Indirect Costs** (\$34,286).