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The News Literacy Project: Bringing Accountability Into the Classroom

By Drew Grant on October 27, 2009 5:00 PM



Vivian Schiller, Soledad O'Brien and Alan Miller Photo via [Meredith Goncalves](#)

Last night, Time Warner hosted a litany of major media players, all gathered in support of [The News Literacy Project](#). Founded by [Alan Miller](#), who left his investigative reporter position at the [Los Angeles Times](#) to do the unthinkable – teach students to think critically about the barrage of information thrown at them on the Internet — the program attracted the attention of board members like [NPR](#) CEO [Vivian Schiller](#), [CNN](#)'s Soledad O'Brien and [Paul Mason](#), formerly of [ABC News](#). Also on hand yesterday evening was [The New York Times](#) publisher [Arthur Sulzberger Jr.](#), one of the evening's co-hosts and participants in last night's silent auction to raise money for the NLP.

Launched last spring, the NLP brings journalists from across the media world to social studies, English, and history classes in middle and high schools in New York City, Maryland, and Chicago where they teach students how to think critically and pick out reliable information from the overwhelming amount of news that bombards them every day.

Last night's fundraiser included panels with some of the inaugural members of the program, including [Anabel Rivas](#), a graduate of New York's [Facing History School](#) (one of the three public schools that participated in the first NLP program), as well as Facing History's principal [Gillian Smith](#), Vice Principal [Mark Otto](#) and AP English teacher [Kristina Wylie](#), whose classroom was one of the first to benefit from the News Literacy Program.

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NLP students and Facing History English teacher Kristina Wylie

O'Brien moderated a panel discussion that included several students who had participated in the program, letting each one speak about how journalists visiting their classroom taught students about everything from sourcing material to civic accountability. By focusing on middle and high school students, Miller hopes to instill some of the ethics and skills of reporting on young people who may not even plan on being journalists, he said. The goal is that the students will come out of the program with the critical reasoning skills of a journalist, and become the critically thinking news consumers of the future.

Later in the night, minglers were encouraged to bid on the auction items, which ranged from a two-week internship with O'Brien to "A Day In The Life at '60 Minutes,'" as well as a lunch date with Sulzberger, where you and five friends could get a personalized tour of the *Times* newsroom from the publisher himself. We also saw two tickets being bid on for an "Iron Chef" taping. By the time we left, the internship with O'Brien was far ahead of any other auction, with a lead of approximately \$800.

The irony didn't escape us that most of the board members and media companies involved in The News Literacy Project have been fighting to stay in business and compete with digital media, yet were funding a project that applies seemingly to no better resource *besides*. Many of those present talked about helping students use the Internet to search for reliable sources of news, seemingly with the hope that those reliable sources will be traditional sources of journalism like the *Times* or CNN. "We realized that these students were getting their news from the Web," Miller explained. "So we wanted to give them the tools to be able to sort through it."

A short video clip shown during the middle of the event showed students eagerly snatching up free copies of the *Times*. If they can keep just some of that hunger for news as they grow up, our industry may have a chance — whether its future is online or in print.

To find out more about the News Literacy Project, visit [their website](#).

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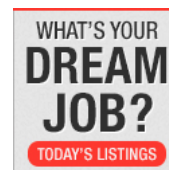


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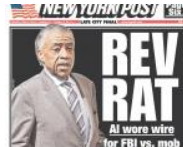
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