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## The Past, Present, and Future of Media Literacy Education

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### Abstract

Media literacy education in the United States is actively focused on the instructional methods and pedagogy of media literacy, integrating theoretical and critical frameworks rising from constructivist learning theory, media studies and cultural studies scholarship. This work has arisen from a legacy of media and technology use in education throughout the 20th century and the emergence of cross-disciplinary work at the intersections of scholarly work in media studies and education. Reflecting the emergence of a common ground for the field, the *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States* was created by a team of scholars and practitioners in 2007. This work reconciles the “protectionist” and “empowerment” wings of the media literacy education community and attempts to counter various misunderstandings among non-specialists. Two issues are identified for their potential to impact the future of the field: (1) media literacy’s relationship to the integration of educational technology into the K-12 curriculum and (2) the relationship between media literacy education and the humanities, arts, and sciences.

*Keywords:* Protectionist, Empowerment, Media Literacy, Pedagogy

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When some members of the media literacy education community gather in Detroit, Michigan in 2009 as part of the convening of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) conference, it’s clear that there has been significant progress in helping build the communication, creativity, collaboration and critical thinking skills of children, young people and adults in relationship to mass media, popular culture and digital technologies. The development of a scholarly journal devoted specifically to developing and sharing knowledge about the theory, pedagogy and practice of media literacy education is, therefore, timely and much needed. We are proud to introduce this online, open-access journal to the global community of scholars with interests in media literacy education.

The theme of the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Media Literacy Education* explores the past, present, and future of media literacy education. Because the field of media literacy education attracts scholars and educators with expertise in so many diverse fields and occupations, including media studies, curriculum and instruction, literacy studies, public health, educa-

tional technology, policy and regulation, child development, religious education (and many more), we are faced with a conundrum. How can we fully capture the diversity of ‘past’ ideas and experiences that shape our practices? How can we capture the ‘present’ state of media literacy education worldwide, let alone in the United States in a country of 300 million people, with more than 4,000 colleges and universities and over 75 million children in a highly decentralized system of elementary and secondary schools? How can we determine what media literacy looks like in the many nations around the world where it is now actively developing? How is it possible to predict the unknowable ‘future’ of media literacy education to consider how changes in the landscape of 21st century communication technologies may shape instructional practices locally, nationally, and globally?

### **The Past: Threads in the Historical Fabric of Media Literacy Education**

There are many ways to look at the warp and weft of intellectual progenitors who have contributed the theory and practice of media literacy education. As

Jacquinet (2008) has explained in her review of media literacy education's European history, media literacy education (MLE) is a highly contextualized activity that takes many forms in many different cultural and learning environments. With that in mind, it's easy to see media literacy as an extension of the practice of rhetoric, developed during the 5th century B.C. to teach the art of politics through the development of oratory and critical thinking. It's also possible to see its roots in the emergence of film as a tool for teaching and learning, particularly in the development of language, critical analysis, and literacy skills. The threads of MLE history are reflected in some of the fragmentation and dissonance embedded in the issues and arguments that still circulate as "great debates" in our field (Hobbs 2008; 1998). Here we humbly review briefly only a few threads of the historical fabric of media literacy education, with hope that future scholars may continue to explore the many dimensions of our complex history for the readers of this journal.

As a fundamental part of the warp threads of our history, the "critical questions" that are so valued by media literacy educators originate in the instructional practices developed in ancient Greece, where we learned that knowledge can be developed through questioning practices that deepen analysis and reflection. Starting with one's own experience of contemporary culture is a primary warp thread in the fabric of media literacy education. When John Dewey explained that learners' lived experiences and concerns about their own day-to-day environment are at the root of the meaning-making process, he was writing at a time when children of the early 20th century were beginning to make their first regular visits to the nickelodeon theatres of the big cities, where Thomas Edison<sup>1</sup> and his associates were beginning to create and distribute a wide variety of narrative and non-fiction films.

Media literacy educators have long been responsive to changes in media and technology systems. We can see some elements of this in an issue of *Visual Education* from 1922, where a teacher from Indianapolis describes the use of motion pictures as a means to teach writing to Grade 8 students. Her detailed description of her learning outcomes includes "to give practice in English composition, to develop standards by which to judge motion pictures" and to promote "appreciation for the technique of the motion picture as contrasted from the play and the story" (Orndorff 1921, 11). She describes with precision the process of viewing and discussing a contemporary film of inter-

est to students, displaying writing samples of students' work, noting that their writing demonstrates the capacity of children to write with sustained effort when they have something meaningful to say.

Sadly, the organization that founded the journal, the Society for Visual Education—established in 1919 by professors from the University of Chicago and other distinguished educational institutions—foundered and failed after only a few years (Saettler 2004). Other organizations of the time included the National Academy of Visual Instruction, the Visual Instruction Association of America, and the Division of Visual Instruction of the National Education Association. During the first half of the 20th century, there were four publications devoted to the topic: *Moving Picture Age*, *Educational Film Magazine*, *Visual Education* and *The Screen*. But all this effort was not to last: a host of companies that began to support the work of bringing films into the classroom failed over a period of 20 years (Saettler 2004). By 1937, it was clear that film as an educational tool was only a tiny part of the enterprise of education, limited to a few large urban school districts.

What happened? Tensions between education and business leaders contributed to the failure of the visual education movement. Educators resisted the slick promotional propaganda used by film companies promoting their wares. The overall incoherence of the field was another significant problem, with fragmentation among educators interested in creating educational films, those interested in using existing commercial films as teaching tools, those interested in adult education, and those interested in the newer technologies, like radio, not to mention the business community's interests in selling projectors, screens, films, support materials and ancillary equipment to schools. When the Rockefeller Foundation studied the problem, they determined that "both educators and business men [sic] developed the notion that entertainment, commercialism and education do not mix" (Saettler 2004, 106).

But in the second half of the 20th century, new visions of media literacy were emerging as the field of communication began to develop in American universities and around the world. Many scholars and educators were influenced by cross-disciplinary work in the humanities and social sciences by scholars like Walter

<sup>1</sup> It was Edison who believed that film's educational power was so great that it would "revolutionize the educational system" and supplant the use of textbooks (Cuban 1986, 9).

Ong, Louis Mumford, Jacques Ellul, Roland Barthes, Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. When the film literacy movement arrived in the United States, borrowing many ideas from work by educators and film scholars in Great Britain, it emphasized the development of abilities that enable children to have an understanding of the techniques and ‘language’ of film. Some saw this as a way to raise children’s standards of taste and quality while others saw this as a means “to protect children from the distracting influences of Hollywood by teaching them to understand how the cinema worked” (Alvarado, Gutch, and Wollen 1987). Media literacy education was understood as a ‘cognitive defense’ against the most overt and disturbing forms of sensationalism and propaganda pouring out of the rapidly growing culture industries. In the 1950s and 60s, the ‘film grammar’ approach to MLE developed, where educators began to show commercial films to children, having them learn a new terminology consisting of words such as fade, dissolve, truck, pan, zoom, and cut. Films were connected to literature and history. To understand the constructed nature of film, students explored plot development, character, mood and tone.

During the 1970s and 1980s, attitudes about mass media and mass culture began to shift yet again, moving away from the long-held position that media and entertainment culture was “reshaping the human personality along the lines imposed by technological domination” (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991) and thereby needed to be hated, feared, and rejected. Around the English-speaking world, educators began to realize the need to “guard against our prejudice of thinking of print as the only real medium that the English teacher has a stake in” (Hazard and Hazard 1961, 133). A whole generation of educators began to not only acknowledge film and television as new, legitimate forms of expression and communication, but also explored practical ways to promote serious inquiry and analysis—in higher education, in the family, and in K-12 and afterschool contexts.

In the 1960s, educators began exploring how to use the new portable video recorders for creative, expressive, and educational purposes (Moody 1999). There was a significant DIY (“do it yourself”) movement resulting from advances in video technology that seemed to offer everyone the promise of becoming a communicator. Making a film not only “can help a child learn how films are made or why they are art, but can help him to learn how to manipulate images in his

head, how to think with them, and how to communicate through them” (Worth 1981, 122). More than just teaching filmmaking, what many hoped the field could achieve was some sustained exploration of the deeper relationship between symbol systems, culture, and cognition (Salomon, 1979). After all, human cognitive and emotional processes cannot be conceptualized without a careful examination of the variety of symbolic modes through which we become members of our culture. This idea has led to scholars to conceptualize MLE as a transcurricular practice that “dissolves the borders between the disciplines in the school” and links the “school and life worlds of children and young people outside school” (Krucsay 2008, 198).

But this idea met with some resistance from those who worried that a focus only on ‘writing’ the media would diminish the power of developing ‘reading’ skills. Educators saw that student excitement about media production quickly waned when the vast effort required to create a film became apparent. And what was actually being learned from all that time spent making a film? Scholars like Len Masterman (1985) believed that students’ sense of “inferiority” was reinforced because they inevitably compared their own little productions to those of commercial media. He urged educators to avoid the “technicist trap” (26), the reductive practice that turns media literacy education into a set of technical operations—just learning how to use the tools. Instead, Masterman argued, media literacy educators need to unpack the complex economic relationships that underpin the structure of media and culture industries, because questions about authors and audiences, messages and meanings, and representations and realities are always constrained by economic issues that reproduce and maintain unequal power relationships.

During the 1970s, media literacy education began to be recognized as a critical practice of citizenship, part of the exercise of democratic rights and civil responsibilities. Developed initially in the 20th century from work by education scholars like Lev Vygotsky and Paolo Freire, literacy is conceptualized as a socio-cultural practice that embodies, reflects, and refracts power relations. Postman and Weingartner (1969) conceptualize one form of inquiry learning through describing how it alters the nature of the authority relationship between teacher and student: (1) the teacher rarely tells students a personal opinion about a particular social or political issue; (2) does not accept a single statement as an answer to a question;

(3) encourages student-student interaction as opposed to student-teacher interaction, and generally avoids acting as a mediator or judging the quality of ideas expressed; and (4) lessons develop from the responses of students and not from a previously determined “logical” structure. Such approaches depend on activating student motivation and engagement through the exploration of issues that are perceived to be relevant and meaningful to learners.

Offering considerable transparency on the workings of both media industries and government agencies in the United States, a generation of educators and activists were inspired by people like former FCC commissioner Nicholas Johnson. His 1970 book, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*, denounced media’s underrepresentation and negative depiction of African-Americans and Hispanics and encouraged readers to demand changes from local and national news organizations. Educators, filmmakers, and media professionals began calling for the kind of transparency in media institutions that enables people to “see how the sausage is made,” challenging the dominant representations presented in the media—including stereotyped representation of age, race, occupation, social class, gender, and sexual orientation.

But by the mid-1990s, however, concerns began to emerge about the conflation of media activism and media literacy education. At the 1997 Media and Democracy event, hundreds of participants loudly booed Walter Anderson, editor of *Time* magazine, disabling an opportunity for dialogue and signaling the distrust and scorn many attendees held for the mass media. At the same event, when Neil Postman offered a sharp critique of the “radical correctness” of the group, a contentious debate erupted (Wehmeyer 2000, 96), reflecting one of the ‘great debates’ in media literacy: “Should media literacy have a more explicit political or ideological agenda?” (Hobbs 1998). In 2000, members of the U.S. media literacy community split over their disagreements over this and a related ‘great debate’ issue of whether MLE should seek the financial support of media industries. Two groups emerged: Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) and the Alliance for a Media Literate America (now the National Association for Media Literacy Education, NAMLE). Today, we still experience tensions between educators, activists, artists, civic, political, governmental, media, and business leaders regarding the differing roles and functions of MLE in the context of ideological and economic

issues related to media and communications technologies. Many of the following important perspectives still ignite controversy. There are the political and governmental leaders who see MLE as an “alternative to censorship,” an opportunity to move government out of the business of media regulation. There are media literacy educators who push their political agendas onto students, offering their critique of capitalism as gospel and orchestrating student ‘voice’ in a mandated form of ‘service learning,’ coercively enrolling students into a political action project, telling them what to think instead of encouraging them to think for themselves. There are those whose opposition to ‘big media’ propels their participation in media literacy education, who believe that the media literacy movement has stepped away from its critical focus and lost its edge, teaching aesthetic and text-analysis skills but not “creating an engaged student who has the capacity to undertake social action” (Quin and McMahon 2007, 229). There are others who worry that MLE increases alienation and promotes cynicism, robbing students “of their sense of focus and ambition as it relentlessly drives home the dour political-economic magnitude of the media machine” (Zanker 2007, 53). And there are those who are troubled by their discovery that MLE can activate, among some students, an outpouring of transgressive moments as in student-created videos that feature parodic, horrific, grotesque, and forbidden content, sometimes involving animal cruelty, violence, sexuality, gender and racial stereotypes, “which push us to question how comfortable we are when the curriculum becomes child-centered” (Grace and Tobin 1998, 45).

As significant warp threads in the historical fabric of media literacy education, we acknowledge these kinds of complex tensions as part of the “journey to empowerment.” Individuals, groups, business, and civil society all play a role in this journey, managing the benefits, risks, and harms of full participation in mass media, popular culture, and digital media (Frau-Meigs 2008, 73). As part of the journey, these (and other) tensions are an inherent part of our discourse community and not to be dismissed, trivialized, or marginalized. Research around these issues is essential as media literacy education continues to put emphasis on concepts of knowledge, identity, culture, and power, situating these ideas in the context of learning and teaching. To be truly literate means being able to use the dominant symbol systems of the culture for personal, aesthetic, cultural, social, *and* political

goals—and as a result, respect for personal autonomy becomes paramount within a pluralistic understanding of media literacy education (Masterman 1985).

Today, we face new and even more polished promotional propaganda from the digital culture industries who encourage both educators and students to acquire and use new media tools, but do not place a premium on critical engagement with media's changing forms and content and its impact on lifestyles, social norms, and values. The longstanding and widespread argument used by media literacy educators—about the need for education to be relevant to the lived cultural experience of students with mass media and popular culture—seems to have lost its prominence as educators seek something which is simultaneously more basic and more challenging: to bring online technology tools into classroom to harness their use for socially-connected (or participatory) learning. So for many educators around world, the social media landscape made possible by online digital technologies are the shifting tectonic plates at our feet, destabilizing us, invigorating us, and creating new opportunities, problems, and priorities.

### **The Present: Stakeholders Focus on Digital Technology Use**

In the United States and in many other countries, the rise of interest in 'tool competence' (Tyner 1998) has begun to eclipse momentum on issues formerly central to those in the media literacy community: advertising and consumerism; the quality of news and journalism; media ownership and consolidation; media violence and behavior; the representation of gender, class and race; and media's impact on public health and well-being. The current focus on what the Internet and digital media can potentially offer in the way of creativity, learning, and social connectedness has eroded interest in these more sober topics. In U.S. schools, the spending spree is on as school districts use the new spigot of economic stimulus monies to buy hardware and software that will 'modernize' the curriculum, repeating the ineffective and cyclical process well-documented by Cuban (2001; 1986), where the passion for the latest technologies and tools outstrips school administrators' interest in the development of curriculum content or teachers' or students' knowledge and skills. Media literacy not only competes with related concepts like ICT literacy, critical literacy, media management, and information literacy (Hobbs 2008); now 'digital citizenship' and 'new

media literacies' emphasize the skills and knowledge needed to be effective in the increasingly social media environment, where the distinctions between producer and consumer have evaporated and the blurring between public and private worlds create new ethical challenges and opportunities for children, young people, and adults.

In the participatory culture that is now emerging, "the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies" where average consumers can "archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways." Such a world full of ever-changing technologies means that new media literacies must include the skills, knowledge, ethical frameworks, and self-confidence to deploy those tools toward our own ends (Jenkins 2006, 8). Technology companies like Verizon, Dell, Apple, and Microsoft support well-funded initiatives in 21st century learning, where educational technology specialists convince school leaders that all learning must become digital (E-School News 2009).

Quite a bit of hype has been perpetuated among the legion of advocates, telling us that children and teens are actively creating content online by sharing their writing, video, music, and photography. But what is the reality? Sadly, neither creation nor sharing is randomly distributed among a diverse group of young adults, since creative activity is related to similar factors as it was in previous times: a person's socioeconomic status. In the United States, only about 27% of the adult population completes college or university (U.S. Census 2003). Students who have at least one parent with a graduate degree are significantly more likely to create content, either online or offline, than others. "While it may be that digital media are leveling the playing field when it comes to exposure to content, engaging in creative pursuits remains unequally distributed by social background" (Hargittai and Walejko 2009, 256).

Some scholars and educators don't yet fully realize that young people's online media use is entertainment-centered. Adults are using the Internet for email, to get medical information, and to buy things. Young people are using the Internet to interact socially, to play games, and to watch video on their computers and their mobile devices—the two other "screens" in American life. This use of the Internet is growing at a rate far faster than for conventional TV watching (Farhi 2009). The focus on teaching technology skills and the gap between parents, teachers, and

children and young people regarding perceptions of activity has substantial implications for media literacy educators. When students say they use the Internet, they are referring to a set of behaviors totally different than those that teachers activate when they use the Internet. Because of this disconnect, both scholars and educators sometimes overestimate young people's creative production skills in ways that shortchange the learning process. Educators may launch their students into a media production project, believing students to be more familiar with the use of digital media for research and multimedia composition than they actually are. They may initiate an exploration of the content teens place on Facebook or MySpace in order to explore issues of identity and self-representation, only to find students resistant to the process of interrogating and examining these practices.

The problem is that "the supposed existence of a digital generation has had an impact on education, as distance-learning corporations with bells-and-whistles technology get public attention while traditional classroom teaching is ignored," as Vaidhyathan explains it. He quotes a colleague who teaches in a college writing program, noting her point that we face a real danger if "what passes for 'media literacy' now is often nothing more than teaching kids to make prepackaged PowerPoint presentations" (Vaidhyathan 2008, 7). While media literacy educators have a powerful set of conceptual tools to deepen and enrich public discourse about technology, contemporary culture, and education, examples like this demonstrate that it is not clear at this time whether media literacy will achieve the kind of visibility needed to shift the focus away from 'tool competence,' something that's now center-stage in mainstream K-12 education. One possibility is a new emphasis on 'digital citizenship,' a concept deeply allied with MLE and one that is beginning to replace older conceptualization of Internet safety (with its simplistic focus on predators and bullying) with an emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups as communicators on the Internet and in real life.

As Marshall McLuhan helped us to understand, technology giveth and technology taketh away. One of the most ironic facts of life for media literacy educators in the United States today is that while they have more access to mass media, popular culture, and digital technology content than ever before, there is less ability to make educational use of it. Consider, for example, the high school English teacher who

wanted to integrate media literacy into his classroom way back in 1994. At that time, he used his home VCR and a blank tape to tape a movie, TV show, news program, documentary, or a commercial off the air. It was an easy way to bring a wide range of relevant, high-interest video content into school for classroom use. Creative teachers used this content to stimulate discussion and student writing or to build critical analysis skills through comparison-contrast activities. Teachers could build a clip library to support their curriculum, easily integrating media literacy concepts and activities into classes in history, literature, science, or the fine and performing arts.

In 2009, this teacher has a DVR machine at home, which allows him to record and store TV shows for future home viewing, but unless he has the most expensive of machines, he can't make a copy of programs to take into the classroom. In Renee's unscientific survey of K-12 teachers, fewer than 10% have the more expensive technology that enables the creation of a disc or digital copy. The last blank VHS tapes were shipped in 2007 and it's rare to find VHS machines at home or at schools. The demise of VHS also means many films are becoming unavailable to the public (Kaufman 2008). Oh, well, you may say. It's not a problem. In affluent schools, teachers may have access to a subscription-based service where short clips of educational films are available. In poor schools, teachers can find clips on YouTube or other video sharing websites. Indeed, the teacher can find some clips there, although they are notoriously unstable, here one day and gone the next. Of course, college and university teachers can and do make productive use of YouTube in teaching media literacy. But those who work in elementary and secondary education can rarely (if ever) make use of YouTube—it is one of many forms of video content that are nearly always blocked by the school's mandatory Internet filtering software. As a result, K-12 educators cannot access the dynamic array of video content that their students can (and do) view at home. Just as McLuhan (1964) suggested, children spend six hours a day in schools which continue to be more culturally impoverished than their multimedia-rich and electronically-connected homes.

A teacher who wants to use a film clip in high school English can use a DVD, but in the United States, this technology is just plain cumbersome when it comes to effective educational use of film. When a teacher seeks to compare and contrast two versions

of the balcony scene in different film adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, fast forwarding through gritty Hollywood trailers of *Hellboy*, *American Gangster*, and *Baby Mama* really spoils the mood. And because of the time it takes to load a DVD, the process is so time consuming that, by the time the second scene is cued up, the bell has rung and the period is over.

What teachers want and need, if they are to use film properly in the classroom, is to be able to create a set of digital clips that feature just the parts of the movie they want to use. But this can't be done legally ever since 1998, when the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) became law, making it illegal to bypass the CSS encryption technology used in DVDs. The CSS technology makes it impossible to copy an excerpt. However, it is legal for teachers to create and use film clip compilations. According to U.S. Copyright law, the doctrine of fair use (Section 107) enables people to make legal, non-infringing use of copyrighted materials for educational purposes. That's why Renee found herself testifying before the U.S. Copyright Office on May 6, 2009, on behalf of K-12 teachers and students, asking them to unlock the power of film for education (Hobbs 2009). Along with film professors, representatives of the American Library Association and other university library groups, Renee has asked the Copyright Office to issue a special exemption that would enable both teachers and students to circumvent CSS technology to make clip compilations for media literacy education. As another form of community-building and advocacy, media literacy educators have articulated their core principles to provide increased coherence and unity in the field. These shared key concepts and core principles are vital tools for educators who recognize the genuine potential of MLE as an educational practice that holds the possibility of transforming teaching and learning.

### **Looking Towards the Future: The Core Principles as a Pedagogical Model for Educators**

In 2007, when the community came together, under leadership by Faith Rogow, to create the *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States*, the American media literacy community had already developed some consensus about the purpose of media literacy education and its instructional practices and values. The *Core Principles* "articulate a common ground around which media literacy educators and advocates can coalesce" and are "a first step

in the development of clear, measurable outcomes and benchmarks for U.S. schools" (National Association for Media Literacy Education 2007, 1). The *Core Principles* document asserts that media literacy education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create; that MLE is an expanded conceptualization of literacy; that it builds skills for learners of all ages and requires integrated, interactive, and repeated practice; that the purpose of MLE is to develop informed, reflective, and engaged participants essential to a democratic society; that media are part of culture and function as agents of socialization; and that people use their own skills, beliefs and experiences to construct meanings from media messages. These principles attempt to reconcile the differences that exist between the "protectionist" and "empowerment" wings of the American MLE community, situating MLE within both literacy education and constructivist learning theory and emphasizing its role in supporting active democratic citizenship, as opposed to simply creating informed consumers of mass media and popular culture.

This new journal represents a continuing effort to develop the theory and practice of media literacy education. Like the *Core Principles*, it has been inspired by scholars and educators who have been frustrated with the limitations of empirical work in effects of media and technology on children and youth, in educational technology's focus on tools and technologies, and in cultural studies' more abstract and theoretical work in critical analysis of media culture, texts, and industries. There is a real need to support the work of those who are formulating, creating, refining, and testing curriculum theory and instructional methods, practices, and pedagogy in ways that connect to students' experience with mass media, popular culture, and digital media, supporting the development of their critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills.

In articulating these values to a wider audience, the *Core Principles* document uses a structural device to define media literacy education by explaining what it is *not*. Most of these examples attempt to counter various misunderstandings that are held among those who are unfamiliar with the field. For those who may believe that media literacy education offers a leftist ideological perspective on media systems in society, the document states that media literacy education is not a political movement, but an educational discipline: "MLE is not about media-

bashing (i.e., simplistic, rhetorical or over generalized attacks on some types of media or media industries as a whole)" (2). It is not about replacing students' perspectives with the perspectives of the authority, be that expert, scholar, critic, or teacher: instead, MLE "is about teaching them how they can arrive at informed choices that are most consistent with their own values" (4).

As a counterpoint to arguments that media literacy education does not acknowledge or value the contribution of media effects or regulatory or policy issues, the *Core Principles* assert that MLE does not start from the premise that media are inconsequential nor that media are a problem" and "does not substitute for media meeting their responsibility to serve the public interest" (3). The document points out that "MLE does not excuse media makers from the responsibility as members of the community to make a positive contribution and avoid doing harm" (3). It states that MLE "is not focused on changing media, rather on changing educational practice and increasing students' knowledge and skills." (4). The *Core Principles* offers our community a consensus document that helps articulate the unique contribution of media literacy education to the enterprise of teaching and learning in the 21st century.

### **The Future: A Focus on Pedagogy and Practice in Educational Settings**

With the *Core Principles* as a guide, media literacy educators must find creative ways to change educational practice and work to increase the knowledge and skills of every student. With this in mind, we need to broaden the number of educators that we include in our conversations. We must continue to share our resources with educators in English, journalism, health, and history classrooms, and build new relationships with educators working in disciplines that have not traditionally been advocates of media literacy education.

In the fine and performing arts, educators are beginning to embrace technology. While these educators may not be aware of key concepts and questions that guide media literacy education, they are seeking avenues of connection between new media and their art forms to enhance their classrooms. The *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* devotes a large section of their two-volume work to the exploration of digital technology and its interface with the pedagogy of each unique art form. Authors

in this volume argue that, "ultimately, it is arts educators who have a large role to play in helping children deal with the challenges of the digital world, [and that] education in digital literacy should be a central component of contemporary arts curricula" (Snyder and Bulfin 2007). They go on to say that, "developing the curriculum and identifying new styles of teaching and learning in arts education that take account of young people's everyday uses of new media represents the key research challenge" (1307).

Arts researchers, like drama educators John Carroll and David Cameron (2008), demonstrate this type of arts-based learning in action. Using facilitator-generated online social networking and mobile media content, Carroll and Cameron regularly integrate recognized dramatic conventions within digital environments to engage students in story creation. Carroll, Cameron, and their students explore and perform dramatic texts by intermingling the conventions inherent within both theatre and media to achieve story goals. The educators report that students, who act as co-creators of the technology-infused drama, explore a variety of social and cultural issues important to the participants and are especially invested in conversations about identity and power in spaces affected by digital technology (309). Conversations and collaborations between artists and educators can build on this expressed interest in the integration of the arts, media technology, and media literacy education.

Science educators are also primed for interactions with media literacy educators. Science educators often use media literacy language in describing the aims of science curriculum in response to the needs of science students. For example, in *Science Education: Major Themes in Education* it reads, "Science education should develop citizens who are able to critically follow reports and discussions about science that appear in the media and who can take part in conversations about science and science related issues that are part of their daily experience" (DeBoer 2005, 234). Collaborations between media literacy advocates and science educators demonstrate that teachers can provide more authentic educational experiences for students when combining the educational objectives of science educators with media literacy experiences. For example, Science.net is an online game developed by Professor David Williamson Shaffer of the epistemic games project at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. In the game, players assume the role of science reporters. They investigate, develop, and



create stories for an online science newsmagazine in cooperation with journalists. Each player reports on scientific and technological advances and the influence of those developments on their community. The game encourages young people to be critical consumers of scientific information that they encounter (Magnifico 2007). Opportunities like this introduce the combined vocabulary and learning activities of media literacy and science and allow for an introductory space where science educators can explore media literacy in their science classrooms. Media literacy educators should capitalize on such forms of experiential learning while working to engage people across disciplines and areas of interest.

In addition to approaching educators from fields such as the arts and sciences, forward-looking media literacy advocates should seek to encourage students to make use of new opportunities for creation and distribution. There should be no capitulation to the socioeconomic divide that currently hinders participation in digital creativity, expression, and communication. Connectivity and digital engagement and expression are increasingly being equated with citizenship, vested participation or enfranchisement not only in local or national political systems, but in global communities. As a student that Amy encountered as part of a digital media project put it, creation of digital content “was just kind of like opening a window... and now we can choose whether to jump through it” (Jensen 2008, 16). In other words, mediated expression empowered the student to join the community that was previously only experienced from outside the window, looking in. The creation and distribution of mediated messages from this student suddenly gave him a new choice; he could chose to be a vested participant in communities of his choosing—he became, in essence, a citizen of the world.

Educators in many fields of study are eager to find pedagogical tools that help their students engage in conversations about media, popular culture, and digital communication technology as a means to guide their learning. Our responsibility then as media literacy educators is to reach out, to learn from our colleagues in other fields, and to bridge the various disciplines by making the critical connections necessary to enlarge the field.

## **Conclusion**

Media literacy educators need a better understanding of the past, to understand where we are now

and where we are going. We must continue to help students become active authors of media messages, using the full range of digital media and technology tools for self-expression, advocacy, and education. We must continue to address issues that are central to the experience of growing up in a world full of mass media, popular culture and digital media. Learning to analyze news and advertising, examining the social functions of music, distinguishing between propaganda, opinion and information, examining the representation of gender, race and class in entertainment and information media, understanding media economics and ownership, and exploring the ways in which violence and sexuality are depicted in media messages continue to matter as important life skills. With the rise of digital media, there are a range of important new media literacy skills, where we must consider issues of personal and social identity, the complex interplay between what’s private and what’s public, and legal and ethical issues. The powerful conceptual framework of audiences and authors, messages and meanings, representations and realities can deepen students’ reflexivity, critical thinking, and communication skills. But our field is still new and we have so many questions and so much to learn. If we can share our learning and our challenges and questions in a community of critical friends, it is likely the field will continue to grow.

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